IN DEFENSE OF DEFICITS • JAMES K. GALBRAITH

THE Nation.

THE WRONG KIND OF GREEN

HOW CONSERVATION GROUPS ARE BARGAINING AWAY OUR FUTURE

JOHANN HARI

MARCH 22, 2010
TheNation.com

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Letters

Ali Kinani, 1998–2007

Ludlow, Mass.
Thank you, Jeremy Scahill, for "Blackwater's Youngest Victim" [Feb. 22]. I was incredibly moved by Mohammed Kinani's fight to see that his son did not die in vain and that justice will be done. As a father of two young children, I cannot imagine the heartache and grief Kinani is suffering every day. Scahill has shown us that there are people on the other side we can identify with and who deserve our attention.
Kevin M. Brown

Phoenix
Thank goodness for Jeremy Scahill. His articles are always compelling, but I had not felt a deep sense of rage until I read Mohammed Kinani's account of the loss of his 9-year-old son, Ali, in Nisour Square in 2007. Kinani's admiration of America and Americans, despite this horrific loss, will be sorely misplaced if we fail to bring these Blackwater barbarians to trial. I extend my deepest sympathies to Mohammed and his family and will petition our government to pursue justice so that his simple demand for an apology can be satisfied.
Craig Randleman

Birmingham, Ala.
This is the *Nation* I have been renewing my subscription for. I found myself weeping at Mohammed Kinani's description of those horrific moments that robbed his family of its youngest son, and other families of their loved ones. My heart swelled and then broke with the realization that the principles that Kinani considers to be American did not die along with his son that September day in Nisour Square. It is with a great sense of hope in those same principles that I look forward to seeing Blackwater founder Erik Prince, the six men responsible and the Blackwater company face Kinani in a North Carolina courtroom in the very near future. Please keep us updated on the trial.
J. Darrell Strickland

letters@thenation.com

And Now, How About Some Democracy?

Galena, Ill.
In "How to Get Our Democracy Back" [Feb. 22], Lawrence Lessig describes how enormous pools of corporate wealth have compromised the integrity and effectiveness of Congress. I agree with Lessig's analysis, but I think the core problem is vast corporate wealth that no government can regulate. As long as so much wealth remains in so few hands, we can be sure that permanent war will continue to enrich the likes of Lockheed and GE, that factory farming will continue to enrich the likes of Monsanto and ADM, and that financial bubbles will continue to enrich the Citigroups of the world.

Congress is not the problem; it's just a symptom. The multinational corporations and the government agencies that serve them—the Pentagon, Federal Reserve, USDA, etc.—will remain in control until we overturn the legal fiction of corporate personhood. Only a democratic revolution can stop them. Go to movetoamend.org to sign the petition. Congress will follow if the people lead.
Stephen McGuire

Ukiah, Calif.
In 2003 I created Ten Amendments to Take Back America. These include eliminating corporate personhood (very timely after the *Citizens United* case); publicly financed elections; making illegal all gifts to elected officials and candidates; free media time for all candidates; and abolition of the Electoral College, among others. These are critical to getting our democracy back (if we ever had it). We will continue to have a plutocracy unless the Constitution is thus amended. I support Professor Lessig's call for a constitutional convention and urge all your readers to do the same.
Charles Holzhauer

Maple, Wisc.
We have always been ruled by the wealthy and big business: read Howard Zinn's *A*

(continued on page 24)

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The Moyers Legacy

Even in an age of old-media uncertainty, much is still made of the transfer of network anchor and host positions. Too often the discussion is purely about personality, but there's more to it than a celebrity shuffle: the character and content of programs with rich histories and the potential for crucial contributions to civic discourse are at stake. So oceans of ink are spilled when CBS shifts the news anchor chair from Dan Rather to Bob Schieffer to Katie Couric; or when Tim Russert's *Meet the Press* post goes to David Gregory. Unfortunately, scant attention has been paid to the coming shift of what over the past decade has become the most significant seat in broadcast journalism—the Friday night position occupied by Bill Moyers.

EDITORIAL

Moyers has been the most radical presence on broadcast and cable television since 2002, when the former White House press secretary, newspaper publisher, CBS and NBC commentator, bestselling author and award-winning documentarian settled into the work of producing weekly reviews not of the transitory arguments of the moment but of the great debates on the fate of the Republic. What has made Moyers, who will retire in April, such a radical presence is not his politics but his journalism.

As the host of *NOW With Bill Moyers*, *Moyers on America* and, since 2007, *Bill Moyers Journal*, he has provided an antidote to the blather served up by most news and public affairs programs. Never satisfied to practice stenography to power, as so many news programs do, or to moderate recitations of talking points by political hacks, Moyers refuses to treat Americans as imbeciles who need to be ideologically coddled.

Moyers has always chosen his guests with a purpose: to put new ideas, new analyses, new approaches on the table when most outlets invite talking-head insiders to narrow the range of options. So he has earned the ire of the political and corporate elites who benefit most from a constrained debate as he has cultivated an oasis for outliers who offer unbought and unbossed takes on wars of whim, executive excess, economic wrongdoing and, above all, the corruption of politics.

This has made Moyers, whose pronouncements in recent years have celebrated the populist and progressive reformers of a century ago, a tribune for some of the most insightful progressive thinkers of our time, including Barbara Ehrenreich, Lawrence Lessig, Glenn Greenwald, Michael Pollan, Nikki Giovanni, Roberto Lovato and George Soros.

But Moyers was never satisfied to push the ideological boundary to the left; he also pushed to the right. During the Bush/Cheney years, he hosted not only liberal and progressive critics of the administration (including editors and writers from this magazine) but also conservatives like Richard Viguerie, Cal Thomas and Ron Paul, the Texas Republican the host famously introduced, with a reference to Paul's warnings about the folly of invading Iraq, as "a man who was right when no one listened."

Indeed, while other media outlets portrayed the mid-2000s as a time of simplistic partisan positioning, Moyers viewers were among the first to learn that true conservatives were angry with the GOP administration's excessive spending and disregard for the Constitution. And then, after Barack Obama took office, Moyers began to highlight criticisms from the left and right of the Democratic president's Wall Street–friendly economic policies and unfulfilled promises on torture and transparency.

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This delight in dissent from conventional wisdom—from wherever it may come on the political spectrum—made Moyers a worthy successor to the late William F. Buckley, whose 1966-99 program, *Firing Line*, was similarly adventurous when it came to challenging compromised decision-makers and compromised journalism. A man of the mainstream right, Buckley invited onto his show libertarians and socialists, Margaret Thatcher and Jesse Jackson, Ronald Reagan and Noam Chomsky, Milton Friedman and John Kenneth Galbraith. Just as *Firing Line* mattered, not merely because of the topics but because of the liveliness and intelligence of the discussion, so watching Moyers has mattered.

The question is whether what comes next will matter. PBS plans to replace *Bill Moyers Journal* with a public affairs program featuring a new format. Whoever fills the slot will no doubt do things differently, which is to be expected. But it's crucial that a forum be maintained for those with dissenting views—on the left and the right—and for those who are ready to toss aside talking points and wrestle honestly with the great issues of the day. Moyers has created a necessary forum, as did Buckley before him. To lose it would be disastrous, not just for PBS and broadcast television but for our Republic, which can ill afford the hollow hectoring and pointless positioning that passes for debate on TV programs that in entire seasons don't say as much as Bill Moyers does in a single show.

The Contractor Scofflaws

As Washington focuses on Barack Obama's other troubles, the president is on the brink of committing a significant good deed for working people and taxpayers. He intends to change the rules for a very privileged business sector—the scofflaw federal contractors who live off public money yet routinely flout laws and social standards. They do so by abusing their workers and violating wage-and-hour laws, trashing environmental standards, failing to pay their federal taxes—cheating their best customer, the government, in obvious ways.

COMMENT

Punishing federal contractors may sound like inside baseball, but it speaks to the larger outrages in government and private enterprise. POGO, the Project on Government Oversight, has kept score on contractor misconduct for many years and campaigned for serious reform. Some very big names—and huge sums of money—are involved. Military contractor Lockheed Martin tops POGO's list of "worst 100 contractors," with $34.2 billion in government business and a record of fifty instances of civil, criminal and administrative misconduct. ExxonMobil, General Electric, Boeing, Honeywell and others are close behind.

Government tolerates the misbehavior and looks the other way. The worst that might happen is a trivial fine. Confronting companies with the risk of losing federal contracts because of their misconduct has real potential, beyond the arms manufacturers. Over time, it could alter the pattern of destructive corporate behavior across many sectors. The construction industry is

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Noted.

TEA PARTY TEXAS: This just in: Texas Republicans hate Washington! Nearly 70 percent of those who voted in a wild three-way primary for governor on March 2 supported one of two candidates who've flirted with secession, demagogued about "states' rights" and raised the ghost of **John C. Calhoun** with calls for "nullification and interposition." Fifty-one percent of those anti-Washington votes went to Governor **Rick Perry**, the two-term incumbent, enough for Perry to avoid a runoff with Senator **Kay Bailey Hutchison**, who finished a distant second with 30 percent. By the end of the campaign, Perry and tea party insurgent **Debra Medina**—who came in third with 18 percent of the vote after mounting a surprisingly competitive low-budget race—had turned Hutchison from the state's most popular politician into a squirrelly symbol of federal "gummint," as the late **Molly Ivins** used to call it.

Now Perry will face the state's most popular advocate and practitioner of good gummint in the general election. Former Houston Mayor **Bill White**, who won more than three-fourths of the Democratic primary vote over six opponents, has been sharply critical of Perry's antigovernment grandstanding and claims to embody "true Texas values." "We are committed to competence," White said at his victory celebration, "and we consider that a Texas value too." That message sounds like a sure loser in Texas—except that White has out-fundraised Perry, leads in the polls among likely independent voters and stands to benefit from the demographic changes eating away at Texas Republicans' edge. Whether White can break the GOP's sixteen-year unbeaten streak in statewide races will depend, more than anything, on whether the majority of Texans are ready, at long last, to stomach the prospect of functional governance. BOB MOSER

FRONTIER FILMMAKER: The documentary filmmaker and political radical **Leo Hurwitz** (1909-91) might have been described as a one-man Popular Front, if he hadn't begun making films several years before the Popular Front was declared. Working with fellow artists who ranged from **Paul Strand** to **Paul Robeson**, he directed, photographed or participated in many of the key American leftist films of the 1930s and '40s, from a "workers' newsreel" report on the National Hunger March on Washington in 1932 to *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, *Heart of Spain*, *China Strikes Back* and *Native Land*.

That much is in all the histories, as is Hurwitz's place on Hollywood's blacklist. Less well-known is Hurwitz's role in the early 1950s in helping to develop the type of shot-on-the-scene documentary that's now standard fare on television (*Emergency Ward*); his pioneering work in memorializing Auschwitz (*The Museum and the Fury*, made in 1956 for Film Polski); and his explorations in the 1960s and '70s of subjects such as the visual arts, the poetry of **Hart Crane** and the waterfront of his native New York.

So if the culture of the Popular Front (before, during and after) deserves a respectful re-evaluation, as **D.D. Guttenplan** recently argued in these pages, the full career of Leo Hurwitz is a subject begging for exploration. Fortunately, it's getting one: a thorough retrospective titled "Leo Hurwitz and the New York School of Documentary Film," on view at **Anthology Film Archives** in New York City, March 10-19. These are not pictures you can get through Netflix; nor can they be fully appreciated in a living room. You want to gather shoulder-to-shoulder with your fellow moviegoers and see them on Second Avenue. For information: anthologyfilmarchives.org.

STUART KLAWANS

DEMOCRATIC SHOWDOWNS: The GOP is not the only party experiencing 2010 primary fights for its soul. Just as highly publicized Republican contests like the Florida Senate race between relatively moderate Governor **Charlie Crist** and tea party favorite **Marco Rubio** will help define the direction of the Republicans, so the Arkansas Senate race between corporate-friendly incumbent **Blanche Lincoln** and populist Lieutenant Governor **Bill Halter** (who jumped into the race March 1) could set the tone for Democrats.

The Lincoln–Halter race is one of a growing number of Congressional contests between Democratic incumbents who have disappeared into Washington's murky middle and fired-up populists. For instance, appointed Colorado Senator **Michael Bennet**, a business-friendly Banking Committee member dismissed by Denver-based author and radio host **David Sirota** as "an aristocrat/DC insider (who) is being floated by out-of-state special interest cash," faces a challenge from former state House Speaker **Andrew Romanoff.**

"Millions of Americans are losing our jobs, our homes, our health coverage and our savings; yet the US Senate, which is supposed to be the greatest deliberative body in the world, has become a place where good ideas go to die," Romanoff declared in his opening statement at the first primary debate in Denver in February. "It's become a wholly owned subsidiary of the industries it is supposed to be regulating. It's a country club where only the richest and most powerful can pay to play." Romanoff says his primary win would send a signal "loud enough even for Washington to hear."

Halter brings a similar message to the Arkansas race, and he adds a twist. With Lincoln's poll ratings sagging, he suggests the only way a Democrat will keep this Southern seat is by recognizing that "Washington is broken." In a campaign video, Halter slams the Beltway establishment for "bailing out Wall Street with no strings attached, while leaving middle-class Arkansas taxpayers with the bill; protecting insurance company profits instead of protecting patients and lowering health costs; gridlock, bickering and partisan games while unemployment is at a twenty-five-year high." "Enough's enough!" says Halter.

That aggressive—dare we say angry—message has won Halter an **AFL-CIO** endorsement and a flood of contributions from frustrated **MoveOn** and **ActBlue** activists. Of course, Lincoln is decrying "outside" influence in the May 18 Arkansas primary contest. But Halter's Arkansas roots and his populist appeal raise the prospect that compromising—and compromised—Democrats will get a loud wake-up call from primary voters who want their party to be a whole lot bolder and blunter about what's wrong with America and what needs to change. JOHN NICHOLS

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notorious for violating workers' rights and labor laws. So are the firms that manage vast federal real estate and exploit the underpaid workers who clean office buildings. That's why the service workers union, SEIU, joined POGO and other reform groups like the Center for American Progress to push the issue.

Banking is also vulnerable because it needs federal approval to hold the vast deposits of the government—trillions in cash flow from taxation and spending programs. (Years ago, when banks were first told to obey equal opportunity requirements, the sudden increase in black tellers was remarkable.) Universities are major federal contractors too. The University of California is on POGO's worst 100 list, with twenty-five instances of misconduct. So is the University of Chicago.

Obama's serious intentions are confirmed by the fierce lobbying opposition mounted by industry front groups (a battle first reported by Steven Greenhouse in the *New York Times*). The White House is preparing a new set of procurement regulations that will require government agencies to push back against contractor misconduct in two ways.

First, reform would create the basis to kick out the worst actors—repeat offenders who regularly cheat the system and get away with it. Their low-road behavior often wins the bidding for contracts, but this ultimately dumps greater costs on taxpayers because the low-wage workers typically wind up on food stamps or Medicaid.

Second, Obama wants to alter the terms of competition for government contracts by awarding points to high-road companies for their exemplary behavior—paying decent wages and faithfully observing the law. Procurement officers would be required to weigh the overall behavior of bidders in determining who gets the contract, assuming there is no significant difference in cost.

This approach has enormous potential to undo many of the destructive strategies that corporate managers have adopted during the last generation, such as boosting profits by cutting corners on quality and squeezing workers. Many cities reacted by adopting living-wage standards for public employment and found this did not drive up contract costs appreciably. Maryland enacted a statewide living-wage law and found that it opened the way for higher-quality companies to join the bidding. They drove away the low-wage bottom dwellers. In the best-case scenario, the Obama reforms could turn out to be a first step toward establishing a living-wage requirement for some $500 billion in federal contracts.

But hold the celebration. Making federal contractors responsible for broader obligations, like obeying the law, has great long-term possibilities, but the outcome is not yet secure. The business lobbying is intense. Like so many battles in Washington, this one will be resolved in the fine print of the new regulation, which, as we go to press, is still being drafted by White House gnomes in collaboration with federal agencies like the General Services Administration.

Congress has chewed on this issue for some years but never found the nerve to act. Last year, it came closer when many politicians were determined to punish ACORN for alleged transgressions. Because the allegations were unproven, Congress had to word the measure broadly. But this would have nailed corporate miscreants too, so the sponsors hastily retreated.

In any case, Obama does not need Congressional approval. As president, he has the authority to set new procurement standards by executive order. Contractors who claim otherwise will have to sue. So Obama will be tested again by this question: is he willing to use the government's powers to advance an important reform, or will he settle again for expressing vague good intentions? We will not know until we read the fine print. WILLIAM GREIDER

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

The Legislative Agenda of Congressional Republicans

One simple phrase can make them so
Nostalgic for that Reagan glow.
The Gipper didn't coin it, though.
'Twas Nancy Reagan: "Just say no."

Swords Into Solar Panels

COMMENT

At the end of the White House Summit on Fiscal Responsibility, in February 2009, Senator John McCain steered the conversation toward one of his favorite topics, military waste. "Your helicopter is now going to cost as much as Air Force One," he taunted the president with a smile, urging Obama to cancel the program. "The helicopter I have now seems perfectly adequate to me," the president agreed, smiling back, and then pivoted to the larger lesson: the gold-plated presidential helicopter program is "an example of the procurement process gone amok. And we're going to have to fix it."

Last May I got to see one of the "fixes" get launched, with a front-row seat in the Rose Garden, as Obama signed the Weapons Systems Acquisition Reform Act of 2009. My euphoria lasted until about ten minutes after I'd watched him whir away in one of those helicopters. That was when I let myself dwell on the Senate vote for the legislation: 93–0, an indicator of how worried all those senators were about the "change" this bill purported to bring to their way of doing business.

On the other hand, Obama did act on this "example of the procurement process gone amok" by canceling the helicopter program. What did he mean by "amok"? Three main things: cost overruns, which are nearly universal in military procurement; ever-changing technical specifications for weapons already in production, which is one of the main reasons for those overruns; and contracts spread out into as many Congressional districts as possible, creating a system of political protection that would impress the Mafia.

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In the case of the presidential helicopter, though, the brunt of the jobs impact was going to be concentrated in Owego, New York, a town of about 20,000 outside Binghamton. The main remnant of Owego's once-vibrant manufacturing base is the Lockheed Martin Systems Integration center, where the helicopter is designed and parts of it produced. When news of the cancellation got out, Hailey Bell, the 11-year-old daughter of two employees, wrote to Obama, pleading with him to reconsider. Without the program, she said, "Owego will be a ghost town."

Enter her Congressman, Maurice Hinchey. While he is justifiably proud of one of the most progressive voting records in Congress, Hinchey felt compelled to defend his corner of the military-industrial complex as a linchpin of good union jobs in his district. And he had one very important tool to wield on their behalf: his seat on the defense appropriations subcommittee, the epicenter of the real action in decision-making about what money gets spent on which weapons programs. When all the Congressional sausage got made, Hinchey had salvaged about $130 million to keep the helicopter production lines lukewarm. Nevertheless, nearly 1,000 Owego workers had lost their jobs. All they can do now is hope that when the Obama administration puts out the contract for a scaled-back program, Lockheed wins it, and at least some of them get rehired.

Or is there another way to create jobs in Owego? I submit that there is.

The Obama administration is interested in holistic solutions to national problems. It has hired a manufacturing czar. Its speeches and position papers about the revival of manufacturing invariably focus on building green jobs in a green economy. And it shares McCain's good intentions about cutting Pentagon waste. The administration's $787 billion economic stimulus package reflected those priorities. About $80 billion was allocated to green infrastructure. In future years, we could look back on this legislation as the opening act of a new green industrial policy, one that connects the dots between cutting Pentagon waste and building a green economy.

As an example of what's possible, let's take Owego, which is about fifty miles from Corning. Corning glass, the town's main employer, is working to improve on the solar collector technology that made its partner, Dow Corning, profitable in 2008. This could be a beachhead for solar industry manufacturing in New York's struggling Southern Tier. The Obama administration could nurture a local supplier chain by coordinating direct federal investment, loan guarantees and green job retraining. Technical assistance could be provided by a local branch of the federal Manufacturing Extension Partnership, which could develop a specialty in solar industry manufacturing.

Any attempt to create a coherent industrial policy will no doubt be attacked as socialistic central planning. The charge is spurious, for many reasons, but the fact is that central planning won't be enough. States and localities have been given a great deal of discretion on how to use stimulus bill funding. Critics have argued that this has resulted in policy incoherence, and there is certainly some truth to this. But there is a balance to be found between policy coherence and local control.

If this scenario for creating solar jobs in Owego is to succeed, it will need the active involvement of Owego itself. Citizens and local organizations will have to build support for the plan among local economic development officials and the private sector. They will have to persuade Hinchey to work on getting those green federal dollars steered to the Southern Tier. To help make the connection between the federal and the local, the next jobs bill could contain money for green economic development planning grants, and Owego could apply.

In November the City Council of next-door Binghamton appropriated $56,000, about 15 percent of the cost of installing solar panels at its water filtration plant. The city, which estimates the project will save about $7,500 a year in electricity costs, is hoping for a state grant to fund the rest. If Owego and its potential federal partners play their cards right, the project could be supplied by local manufacturing, which would sustain local jobs.

MIRIAM PEMBERTON

Miriam Pemberton is a research fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.

New Left Review at 50

"It is hard not to be intimidated by *New Left Review*," Stefan Collini wrote recently in the *Guardian*. He's right: first there is the intellectual range and analytical power of the *NLR* writers, and now there's the fact that it has been publishing for fifty years. The fiftieth anniversary issue—the 299th—reviews the magazine's history, announces its current agenda and displays the qualities that have made it so significant over the past half-century. (Note: I've been a friend of several of the editors for years, and *NLR* has published book reviews of mine.)

COMMENT

The journal began as part of a mobilization of students in Britain at the end of the 1950s. In the new issue, Stuart Hall, the first editor, describes the forces that "nourished its initial cohort." They are evident in the first issue—January 1960—which included two pieces on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, critiques of Britain's Labour Party by Ralph Miliband and Clancy Sigal, and discussions of the English working class by Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Edward P. Thompson.

Two years later, a new group, led by Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn, took over the editorial leadership. Their focus was more international and their approach more theoretical. As the movements of the '60s reached a climax in 1968, *NLR* followed closely what looked to many of us like revolution. In the decade that followed, the *Review* became the place young people in the United States and Britain learned about "Western Marxism," from Gramsci and Lukács to the Frankfurt School to Althusser. The range of articles broadened to include extended essays on economics, aesthetics and philosophy, and unforgettable work by Mike Davis on Los Angeles and Fredric Jameson on postmodernism. After the *NLR* editors launched New Left Books in 1970 (later Verso), a new generation of students read the works of continental Marxist theory as they eagerly awaited—and then debated—each issue of the journal.

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In 2000 the journal was relaunched with a new political tone and a sharpened focus. After two decades of triumphant Reaganism and Thatcherism, editor Perry Anderson declared, the political baseline for *NLR* had to be "a lucid registration of historical defeat." The journal, Anderson said, would nevertheless continue its "refusal of any accommodation with the ruling system."

Susan Watkins, who has been the editor since 2003, opens the fiftieth anniversary issue with an editorial that considers the recent global financial collapse and the absence of a concerted left response. In a sentence that exemplifies *NLR*'s political–intellectual stance and its literary style, she writes, "That neoliberalism's crisis should be so eerily non-agonistic, in contrast to the bitter battles over its installation, is a sobering measure of its triumph."

Assessing the magazine's last decade, Watkins finds that *NLR*'s "record on ecological questions has been erratic," while its "record on social issues has been just as uneven, not least on what was once the Woman Question"—all true. But there has also been strong work during this period by Robert Brenner on economic turbulence and by a number of writers on China.

The lead article in the new issue is Mike Davis's discussion of environmental politics after the failure of the Copenhagen summit. "We must start thinking like Noah," he writes. But "since most of history's giant trees have already been cut down, a new Ark will have to be constructed out of the materials that a desperate humanity finds at hand in insurgent communities, pirate technologies, bootlegged media, rebel science and forgotten utopias."

In a surprising development, the publication of Davis's article prompted Alexander Cockburn to resign from the editorial committee. Cockburn, who started writing for the *Review* in 1963 and joined the editorial committee soon thereafter, told me it bothered him that the fiftieth anniversary issue "should be signaled by a particularly uncritical and unscientific embrace of climate catastrophism—now sadly the prime obsession of what passes for the left." Davis appealed to him to reconsider, writing in an e-mail, "Something as trivial as my opinions should not be a cause for severing a moral and political relationship as profound and long-standing as your association with the *NLR*." But Cockburn's name will not be on the masthead when the next issue appears.

The biggest article in the new issue is Perry Anderson's "Two Revolutions," a dazzling piece contrasting the failed Soviet state with the People's Republic of China, now "an engine of the world economy." China today, he writes, represents something new in history: "never have so many moved out of absolute poverty so fast. Never have…. workers, till yesterday theoretical masters of the state, [been] treated at will so ruthlessly—jobs destroyed, wages unpaid, injuries mocked, protests stifled." "Emancipation and regression," Anderson concludes, "have often been conjoined in the past; but never quite so vertiginously as in the China that Mao helped to create and sought to prevent."

The rest of the issue includes longtime editor Tariq Ali's fierce critique of Obama's foreign policy, which, he argues, continues Bush's in every significant way; an interview with Eric Hobsbawm, still brilliant at 92, on the big questions historians should seek to answer in the aftermath of the cold war; and Robin Blackburn's insightful essay on why no socialist movement developed in the United States in the late nineteenth century.

The new issue shows that the 1960s cohort is still as strong as ever—and also that the *Review* has recruited new generations: Gopal Balakrishnan, who is 44 and a member of the editorial committee, has a fascinating piece on Obama's strange connection to Reinhold Niebuhr, the theologian of midcentury cold war liberalism. The masthead includes 33-year-old deputy editor Tony Wood, who writes on Russia and Latin America. Emilie Bickerton, another member of the editorial committee, who writes on French film, is in her 20s, as are several others who have written for the magazine over the past few years.

NLR has often been criticized for being too theoretical, and also too pessimistic. Of course, the absence of a vigorous left-wing movement can make all radical thought seem irrelevant. But the journal's sustained critique of neoliberalism remains indispensable, for understanding the present and for imagining a different future. To do work of this quality during these dark decades is a tremendous achievement—and for that, we thank the *New Left Review*.

JON WIENER

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Alexander Cockburn

Move Over, Axis of Evil

Welcome, "Axis of the Obsessed and Deranged." This was the title of a hysterical column, vibrant with class hatred, by Frank Rich in the February 28 *New York Times*. Rich shrieked that "the acrid stench of 1995 is back in the air." The militias are on the rampage. The sky is dark with the threat of Piper Cherokees being flown by populists into government buildings. To match the virulence of Rich's language you'd have to go back to the tirades flung at David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, some eighty of whom were burned alive outside Waco, Texas, on April 19, 1993, on orders from Attorney General Janet Reno. It was this crime that Timothy McVeigh said he was avenging when he blew up the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City exactly two years later.

As one might expect, Rich had a handy citation to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which plumps up its $170 million-plus asset portfolio with regular alarums about the rise of "hate groups," defined as those "with beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people," which pretty much covers the whole ballpark. That's the same SPLC whose Mark Potok sensitively said after the incineration of the Branch Davidians and children, "The antigovernment movement, the militia, hate groups are absolutely going to get a boost out of this, and I think it's really a tragedy for that reason."

This brings us to the American class system, which Russell Baker once beautifully defined in terms of access to lawyers. Having a lawyer on permanent retainer "is the very essence of richness." That's the upper class. Those in the upper middle class hire a lawyer when they feel they need one to handle wills, contracts and so forth. Middle-class people know they ought to employ lawyers but can't quite afford them. Members of the lower middle class believe they can defend themselves better than any lawyer, and can't afford one anyway. To lower-class folk, public defender and prosecutor look identical.

The lower middle class is what we're focusing on here, the people who own auto repair shops, bakeries, bicycle shops, plant stores, dry cleaners, fish stores and all the other small businesses across America—in sum, the "petite bourgeoisie," stomped by regulators and bureaucrats while the big fry get zoning variances and special clause exemptions. The left always hated the petite bourgeoisie because it wasn't the urban proletariat and thus the designated agent of revolutionary change. Today's left no longer believes in revolutionary change but despises the petite bourgeoisie out of inherited political disposition and class outlook. Ninety-five percent of all the firms in America hire fewer than ten people. There's your petite bourgeoisie for you: not frightening, not terrifying and in fact quite indispensable.

And the petit bourgeois are legitimately pissed off. Whatever backwash they got from the stimulus often wasn't readily apparent. They can't afford health plans for themselves or their employees. They're three or four payrolls away from the edge of the cliff, and when they read about trillions in handouts for bankers, trillions in impending deficits, blueprints for green energy regs that will put them out of business, what they hear is the ocean surge pounding away at the bottom of that same cliff.

The conventional parties have nothing to offer them. The left disdains them. But here comes the tea party, whose spirit is very well caught by David Barstow, the *Times* reporter whose long piece on February 16 prompted Rich's mad column. Rich refers to Barstow's "chilling, months-long investigation of the tea party movement," as though the reporter had gone undercover, watching Klan rituals through binoculars somewhere in a cow pasture. This is a silly mischaracterization of Barstow's perceptive and rather sympathetic account of tea partydom, in which he significantly doesn't quote the SPLC but pops in, right at the end, an obligatory quote from an Idaho lawyer who sued the Hayden Lake Aryans into extinction.

Of course, there are many flavors in the tea party blend. There are nuts and opportunists, as in any political formation. You can trace some of its ideology back to the nineteenth-century Know-Nothings, a typical platform of which, in 1841, called for extending the term of naturalization to twenty-one years, restricting public office to the native-born (there's your birther movement), keeping the Bible in schools and resisting "the encroachment of a foreign civil and spiritual power upon the institutions of our country." Back then this meant the Vatican; today it's Davos, Bilderberg, the UN, the IPCC.

At this point leftists invariably start quoting Richard Hofstadter's 1964 essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." They should put aside that snotty essay and reflect on their own dismal failures. Under the leadership of Obama—cheered into office by 99.9 percent of the left—and a Democratic Congress, we have a whole new war and no antiwar movement of any heft; a bailout for Wall Street; an awful health bill connived at by both parties; the prospect of loan guarantees for new nuclear energy plants; a huge hike in defense spending, particularly nuclear weapons; and, at least at the rhetorical level, an impending onslaught on Social Security. Constitutional abuses endorsed or instigated by the White House continue in a straight sequence from the Bush years.

Response from the left? No twitch in the morgue. The AFL-CIO was bought off from resistance to the health bill by getting relief on its Cadillac health plans. Because of alleged anthropologically prompted global warming, the green movement has sat on its hands, hopelessly split on nuclear power, whose real, baneful effects have been irrefutably demonstrated, starting with nuclear waste. There's been near total silence on the huge nuclear weapons budget boost (the largest for Los Alamos since 1944). Total silence on the Patriot Act, reauthorized February 27. What to do? Rally round the flag and scaremonger about the right, where's there's actual political ferment. ■

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Katha Pollitt

Global Women: Good News, Bad News

And the winner is… Iceland! According to the 2009 Global Gender Gap report of the World Economic Forum, the land of glaciers and puffins, population 319,000, is the most gender egalitarian country on earth, with women having closed 80 percent of the gap with men. Finland (2), Norway (3), Sweden (4) and Denmark (7) are in the top ten too, as is New Zealand (5). You could try harder, Spain (17) and Germany (12)—in 2007 you were in the top ten. And O, Canada: 25. Very sad.

The WEF measures the gap between women and men in four areas—economic activity, education, health and political representation—regardless of the absolute level of resources. Thus South Africa (6) and Lesotho (10) make the top ten, despite widespread poverty, illiteracy and a raging AIDS epidemic. The way the WEP measures the gap is a bit strange. Among the items not measured are reproductive rights (abortion is banned in Ireland (8), and the Philippines (9), where birth control is also hard to find, so how equal is that?); sexual violence (South Africa has the world's highest rate of reported rape); and legal inequality, to say nothing of cultural practices like forced marriage, child marriage and female genital mutilation, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women. Thus, in Lesotho, with one of the world's highest rates of HIV, it's the desperately poor grandmothers who are raising throngs of orphaned grandchildren. Still, let's pause to cheer the fact that there has been measurable improvement for the female population in much of the world. As the report notes, "Out of the 115 countries covered in the report since 2006, more than two-thirds have posted gains in overall index scores, indicating that the world in general has made progress towards equality between men and women."

Indeed, progress can be lightning swift: South Africa advanced sixteen places, partly because a new government brought in more women. Iceland increased women's representation in Parliament from 33 percent to 43 percent in just one year (fun fact—last year Icelandic voters elected Johanna Sigurdardottir, the world's first openly lesbian prime minister, who returned the favor by appointing five women to her interim cabinet, the most in the country's history). Compare that with the United States, where it took all of the 2000s to drag Congress from 17.1 percent to 22.5 percent. Indeed, we rank 61 in political representation, for an overall mediocre score of 31, sandwiched between Lithuania and Namibia. The bottom third of the list is filled with Middle Eastern, Asian and African nations where progress for women is slow or nonexistent: India, for example, gets pretty good press as a rapidly modernizing society, but it comes in at 114, down from 113 in 2008—closer than you might think to notoriously oppressive Iran (128) or Pakistan (132), to say nothing of Chad (133) and Yemen (last place).

That women are gradually moving up in the world—the WEP maintains that globally women have closed 93 percent of the education gap and 96 percent of the health gap—is definitely not the picture you would get from following the headlines, where the news is often unbearable. Right now, for example, Amalia, a young Nicaraguan, is being denied treatment for her cancer. She is twelve weeks pregnant, you see, and doctors are afraid to risk violating the total ban on abortion brought in by Marxist-turned-Catholic Daniel Ortega—even if without treatment she dies, and her fetus dies and her 10-year-old daughter is left motherless. Amalia is not the only Nicaraguan to have suffered as a result of this law—according to Amnesty International, it has caused an increase in maternal deaths. In Turkey, honor killings were highlighted by the gruesome murder of 16-year-old Medine Memi, buried alive by her father because she talked to boys. From Malaysia to Nigeria, women in the Muslim world face canings, floggings and executions for violating Sharia law—for example, by being raped, like 13-year-old Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow of Somalia, stoned to death by fifty men before a stadium audience of 1,000. And what of women caught up in the thirty-three wars raging around the globe, as in Congo, where horrific rapes and tortures are pervasive? Catastrophic violence like that can reduce one to despair pretty quickly.

Protracted struggle is the theme of the UN's Beijing Plus 15 conference, taking place in New York as I write. For example, equal access to education was a key goal of the 1990 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and, as the WEF report found, real progress has been made—in many countries, females now outnumber males in schools and universities. But education is no magic bullet. As Mario Osava writes, "females represent a majority at every level of education in Brazil, and the average rate of schooling among Brazilian women is more than one year higher than that of men. Yet women continue to earn 30 percent less than men for the same work, and they occupy a mere 56 of the 594 seats in the Brazilian Congress."

What's the lesson for the United States? Wealth helps, but it's not enough. It's not automatic that as a country becomes richer and more developed men and women become more equal—especially when conservative religion has power, as in the United States and many nations. To an unusual degree, Americans resist "government" solutions to women's inequality as an affront to meritocracy and individual initiative. But without paid parental leave and a reliable system of quality childcare, women will never be able to get much further toward workplace equality than they are now. Scandinavia's extensive and flexible system of support for parents, including single mothers, is one of the major reasons Scandinavia leads the world in gender equality. Similarly, countries with lots of women in parliament—Rwanda is first, with 56 percent—tend to have quota systems, at least at first. The United States seemed to recognize their efficiency and fairness when it supported quotas in Iraq and Afghanistan. But here at home? Hard to imagine. ■

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THE WRONG KIND OF GREEN

HOW CONSERVATION GROUPS ARE BARGAINING AWAY OUR FUTURE

JOHANN HARI

Why did America's leading environmental groups jet to Copenhagen and lobby for policies that will lead to the faster death of the rainforests—and runaway global warming? Why are their lobbyists on Capitol Hill dismissing the only real solutions to climate change as "unworkable" and "unrealistic," as though they were just another sooty tentacle of Big Coal?

At first glance, these questions will seem bizarre. Groups like Conservation International are among the most trusted "brands" in America, pledged to protect and defend nature. Yet as we confront the biggest ecological crisis in human history, many of the green organizations meant to be leading the fight are busy shoveling up hard cash from the world's worst polluters—and burying science-based environmentalism in return. Sometimes the corruption is subtle; sometimes it is blatant. In the middle of a swirl of bogus climate scandals trumped up by deniers, here is the real Climategate, waiting to be exposed.

I have spent the past few years reporting on how global warming is remaking the map of the world. I have stood in half-dead villages on the coast of Bangladesh while families point to a distant place in the rising ocean and say, "Do you see that chimney sticking up? That's where my house was… I had to [abandon it] six months ago." I have stood on the edges of the Arctic and watched glaciers that have existed for millenniums crash into the sea. I have stood on the borders of dried-out Darfur and heard refugees explain, "The water dried up, and so we started to kill each other for what was left."

While I witnessed these early stages of ecocide, I imagined that American green groups were on these people's side in the corridors of Capitol Hill, trying to stop the Weather of Mass Destruction. But it is now clear that many were on a different path—one that began in the 1980s, with a financial donation.

Environmental groups used to be funded largely by their members and wealthy individual supporters. They had only one goal: to prevent environmental destruction. Their funds were small, but they played a crucial role in saving vast tracts of wilderness and in pushing into law strict rules forbidding air and water pollution. But Jay Hair—president of the National Wildlife Federation from 1981 to 1995—was dissatisfied. He identified a huge new source of revenue: the worst polluters.

Hair found that the big oil and gas companies were happy to give money to conservation groups. Yes, they were destroying many of the world's pristine places. Yes, by the late 1980s it had become clear that they were dramatically destabilizing the climate—the very basis of life itself. But for Hair, that didn't make them the enemy; he said they sincerely wanted to right their wrongs and pay to preserve the environment. He began to suck millions from them, and in return his organization and others, like The Nature Conservancy (TNC), gave them awards for "environmental stewardship."

Companies like Shell and British Petroleum (BP) were delighted. They saw it as valuable "reputation insurance": every time they were criticized for their massive emissions of warming gases, or for being involved in the killing of dissidents who wanted oil funds to go to the local population, or an oil spill that had caused irreparable damage, they wheeled out their shiny

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green awards, purchased with "charitable" donations, to ward off the prospect of government regulation. At first, this behavior scandalized the environmental community. Hair was vehemently condemned as a sellout and a charlatan. But slowly, the other groups saw themselves shrink while the corporate-fattened groups swelled—so they, too, started to take the checks.

Christine MacDonald, an idealistic young environmentalist, discovered how deeply this cash had transformed these institutions when she started to work for Conservation International in 2006. She told me, "About a week or two after I started, I went to the big planning meeting of all the organization's media teams, and they started talking about this supposedly great new project they were running with BP. But I had read in the newspaper the day before that the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] had condemned BP for running the most polluting plant in the whole country.... But nobody in that meeting, or anywhere else in the organization, wanted to talk about it. It was a taboo. You weren't supposed to ask if BP was really green. They were 'helping' us, and that was it."

She soon began to see—as she explains in her whistleblowing book *Green Inc.*—how this behavior has pervaded almost all the mainstream green organizations. They take money, and in turn they offer praise, even when the money comes from the companies causing environmental devastation. To take just one example, when it was revealed that many of IKEA's dining room sets were made from trees ripped from endangered forests, the World Wildlife Fund leapt to the company's defense, saying—wrongly—that IKEA "can never guarantee" this won't happen. Is it a coincidence that WWF is a "marketing partner" with IKEA, and takes cash from the company?

Likewise, the Sierra Club was approached in 2008 by the makers of Clorox bleach, who said that if the Club endorsed their new range of "green" household cleaners, they would give it a percentage of the sales. The Club's Corporate Accountability Committee said the deal created a blatant conflict of interest—but took it anyway. Executive director Carl Pope defended the move in an e-mail to members, in which he claimed that the organization had carried out a serious analysis of the cleaners to see if they were "truly superior." But it hadn't. The Club's Toxics Committee co-chair, Jessica Frohman, said, "We never approved the product line." Beyond asking a few questions, the committee had done nothing to confirm that the product line was greener than its competitors' or good for the environment in any way.

The green groups defend their behavior by saying they are improving the behavior of the corporations. But as these stories show, the pressure often flows the other way: the addiction to corporate cash has changed the green groups at their core. As MacDonald says, "Not only do the largest conservation groups take money from companies deeply implicated in environmental crimes; they have become something like satellite PR offices for the corporations that support them."

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It has taken two decades for this corrupting relationship to become the norm among the big green organizations. Imagine this happening in any other sphere, and it becomes clear how surreal it is. It is as though Amnesty International's human rights reports came sponsored by a coalition of the Burmese junta, Dick Cheney and Robert Mugabe. For environmental groups to take funding from the very people who are destroying the environment is preposterous—yet it is now taken for granted.

This pattern was bad enough when it affected only a lousy household cleaning spray, or a single rare forest. But today, the stakes are unimaginably higher. We are living through a brief window of time in which we can still prevent runaway global warming. We have emitted so many warming gases into the atmosphere that the world's climate scientists say we are close to the climate's "point of no return." Up to 2 degrees Celsius of warming, all sorts of terrible things happen—we lose the islands of the South Pacific, we set in train the loss of much of Florida and Bangladesh, terrible drought ravages central Africa—but if we stop the emissions of warming gases, we at least have a fifty-fifty chance of stabilizing the climate at this higher level. This is already an extraordinary gamble with human safety, and many climate scientists say we need to aim considerably lower: 1.5 degrees or less.

For environmental groups to take funds from the very forces destroying the environment is preposterous—yet it is now taken for granted.

Beyond 2 degrees, the chances of any stabilization at the hotter level begin to vanish, because the earth's natural processes begin to break down. The huge amounts of methane stored in the Arctic permafrost are belched into the atmosphere, causing more warming. The moist rainforests begin to dry out and burn down, releasing all the carbon they store into the air, and causing more warming. These are "tipping points": after them, we can't go back to the climate in which civilization evolved.

So in an age of global warming, the old idea of conservation—that you preserve one rolling patch of land, alone and inviolate—makes no sense. If the biosphere is collapsing all around you, you can't ring-fence one lush stretch of greenery and protect it: it too will die.

You would expect the American conservation organizations to be joining the great activist upsurge demanding we stick to a safe level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere: 350 parts per million (ppm), according to professor and NASA climatologist James Hansen. And—in public, to their members—they often are supportive. On its website the Sierra Club says, "If the level stays higher than 350 ppm for a prolonged period of time (it's already at 390.18 ppm) it will spell disaster for humanity as we know it."

But behind closed doors, it sings from a different song-sheet. Kieran Suckling, executive director of the Center for Biological Diversity, in Arizona, which refuses funding from polluters, has

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seen this from the inside. He told me, "There is a gigantic political schizophrenia here. The Sierra Club will send out e-mails to its membership saying we have to get to 350 parts per million and the science requires it. But in reality they fight against any sort of emission cuts that would get us anywhere near that goal."

For example, in 2009 the EPA moved to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act, which requires the agency to ensure that the levels of pollutants in the air are "compatible with human safety"—a change the Sierra Club supported. But the Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the EPA to take this commitment seriously and do what the climate science says really is "compatible with human safety": restore us to 350 ppm. Suckling explains, "I was amazed to discover the Sierra Club opposed us bitterly. They said it should not be done. In fact, they said that if we filed a lawsuit to make EPA do it, they would probably intervene on EPA's side. They threw climate science out the window."

Indeed, the Sierra Club's chief climate counsel, David Bookbinder, ridiculed the center's attempts to make 350 ppm a legally binding requirement. He said it was "truly a pointless exercise" and headed to "well-deserved bureaucratic oblivion"—and would only add feebly that "350 may be where the planet should end up," but not by this mechanism. He was quoted in the media alongside Bush administration officials who shared his contempt for the center's proposal.

Why would the Sierra Club oppose a measure designed to prevent environmental collapse? The Club didn't respond to my requests for an explanation. Climate scientists are bemused. When asked about this, Hansen said, "I find the behavior of most environmental NGOs to be shocking.... I [do] not want to listen to their lame excuses for their abominable behavior." It is easy to see why groups like Conservation International, which take money from Big Oil and Big Coal, take backward positions. Their benefactors will lose their vast profits if we make the transition away from fossil fuels—so they fall discreetly silent when it matters. But while the Sierra Club accepts money from some corporations, it doesn't take cash from the very worst polluters. So why is it, on this, the biggest issue of all, just as bad?

It seems its leaders have come to see the world through the funnel of the US Senate and what legislation it can be immediately coaxed to pass. They say there is no point advocating a strategy that senators will reject flat-out. They have to be "politically realistic" and try to advocate something that will appeal to Blue Dog Democrats.

This focus on inch-by-inch reform would normally be understandable: every movement for change needs a reformist wing. But the existence of tipping points—which have been overwhelmingly proven by the climate science—makes a mockery of this baby-steps approach to global warming. If we exceed the safe amount of warming gases in the atmosphere, then the earth will release its massive carbon stores and we will have runaway warming. After that, any cuts we introduce will be useless. You can't jump halfway across a chasm: you still fall to your death. It is all or disaster.

By definition, if a bill can pass through today's corrupt Senate, then it will not be enough to prevent catastrophic global warming. Why? Because the bulk of the Senate—including many Democrats—is owned by Big Oil and Big Coal. They call the shots with their campaign donations. Senators will not defy their benefactors. So if you call only for measures the Senate could pass tomorrow, you are in effect giving a veto over the position of the green groups to the fossil fuel industry.

Yet the "conservation" groups in particular believe they are being hardheaded in adhering to the "political reality" that says only cuts far short of the climate science are possible. They don't seem to realize that in a conflict between political reality and physical reality, physical reality will prevail. The laws of physics are more real and permanent than any passing political system. You can't stand at the edge of a rising sea and say, "Sorry, the swing states don't want you to happen today. Come back in fifty years."

Mainstream greens see the world through the funnel of the US Senate and what legislation it can be immediately coaxed to pass.

A classic case study of this inside-the-Beltway mentality can be found in a blog written by David Donniger, policy director of the climate center at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), after the collapse of the Copenhagen climate summit. The summit ended with no binding agreement for any country to limit its emissions of greenhouse gases, and a disregard of the scientific targets. Given how little time we have, this was shocking. Donniger was indeed furious—with the people who were complaining. He decried the "howls of disaster in European media, and rather tepid reviews in many U.S. stories." He said people were "holding the accord to standards and expectations that no outcome achievable at Copenhagen could reasonably have met—or even should have met."

This last sentence is very revealing. Donniger believes it is "reasonable" to act within the constraints of the US and global political systems, and unreasonable to act within the constraints of the climate science. The greens, he suggests, are wrong to say their standards should have been met at this meeting; the deal is "not weak." After fifteen climate summits, after twenty years of increasingly desperate scientific warnings about warming, with the tipping points drawing ever closer, he says the world's leaders shouldn't be on a faster track and that the European and American media should stop whining. Remember, this isn't an oil company exec talking; this is a senior figure at one of the leading environmental groups.

There is a different way for green groups to behave. If the existing political system is so corrupt that it can't maintain basic human safety, they should be encouraging their members to take direct action to break the Big Oil deadlock. This is precisely what has happened in Britain—and it has worked. Direct-action protesters have physically blocked coal trains and new airport runways for the past five years—and as a result, airport runway projects that looked certain are falling by the wayside,

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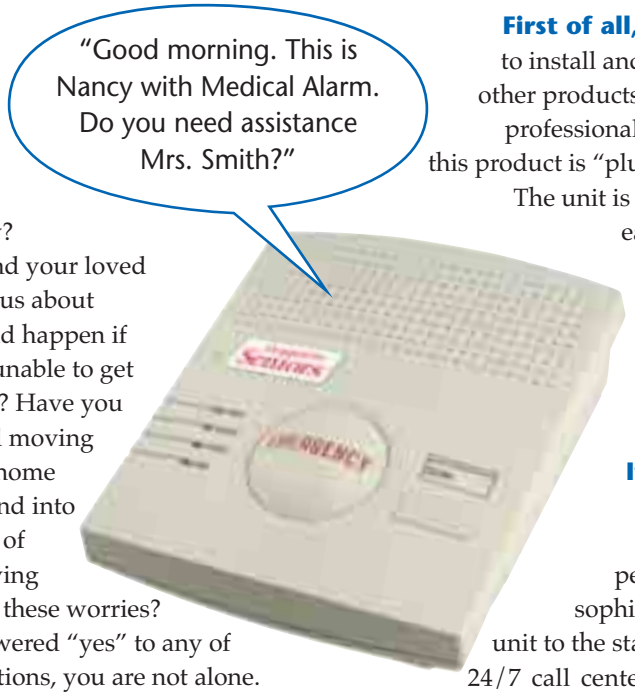

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and politicians have become very nervous about authorizing any new coal power plants [see Maria Margaronis, "The UK's Climate Rebels," December 7, 2009]. The more mainstream British climate groups are not reluctant to condemn the Labour government's environmental failings in the strongest possible language. Compare the success of this direct confrontation with the utter failure of the US groups' work-within-the-system approach. As James Hansen has pointed out, the British model offers real hope rather than false hope. There are flickers of it already—there is an inspiring grassroots movement against coal power plants in the United States, supported by the Sierra Club—but it needs to be supercharged.

By pretending the broken system can work—and will work, in just a moment, after just one more Democratic win, or another, or another—the big green groups are preventing the appropriate response from concerned citizens, which is fury at the system itself. They are offering placebos to calm us down when they should be conducting and amplifying our anger at this betrayal of our safety by our politicians. The US climate bills are long-term plans: they lock us into a woefully inadequate schedule of carbon cuts all the way to 2050. So when green groups cheer them on, they are giving their approval to a path to destruction—and calling it progress.

Even within the constraints of the existing system, their approach makes for poor political tactics. As Suckling puts it, "They have an incredibly naïve political posture. Every time the Dems come out with a bill, no matter how appallingly short of the scientific requirements it is, they cheer it and say it's great. So the politicians have zero reason to strengthen that bill. If you've already announced that you've been captured, then they don't need to give you anything. Compare that to how the Chamber of Commerce or the fossil fuel corporations behave. They stake out a position on the far right, and they demand the center move their way. It works for them. They act like real activists, while the supposed activists stand at the back of the room and cheer at whatever bone is thrown their way."

The green groups have become "the mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, regardless of how pathetic the party's position is," Suckling says in despair. "They have no bottom line, no interest in scientifically defensible greenhouse gas emission limitations and no willingness to pressure the White House or Congress."

It will seem incredible at first, but this is—in fact—too generous. At Copenhagen, some of the US conservation groups demanded a course of action that will lead to environmental disaster—and financial benefits for themselves. It is a story buried in details and acronyms, but the stakes are the future of civilization.

When the rich countries say they are going to cut their emissions, it sounds to anyone listening as if they are going to ensure that there are fewer coal stations and many more renewable energy stations at home. So when Obama says there will be a 3 percent cut by 2020—a tenth of what the science requires—you assume the United States will emit 3 percent fewer warming gases. But that's not how it works. Instead, they are saying they will trawl across the world to find the cheapest place to cut emissions, and pay for it to happen there.

Today, the chopping down of the world's forests is causing 12 percent of all emissions of greenhouse gases, because trees store carbon dioxide. So the rich governments say that if they pay to stop some of that, they can claim it as part of their cuts. A program called REDD—Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation—has been set up to do just that. In theory, it sounds fine. The atmosphere doesn't care where the fall in emissions comes from, as long as it happens in time to stop runaway warming. A ton of carbon in Brazil enters the atmosphere just as surely as a ton in Texas.

If this argument sounds deceptively simple, that's because it is deceptive. In practice, the REDD program is filled with holes large enough to toss a planet through.

To understand the trouble with REDD, you have to look at the place touted as a model of how the system is supposed to work. Thirteen years ago in Bolivia, a coalition of The Nature Conservancy and three big-time corporate polluters—BP, Pacificorp and American Electric Power (AEP)—set up a protected forest in Bolivia called the Noel Kempff Climate Action Project. They took 3.9 million acres of tropical forest and said they would clear out the logging companies and ensure that the forest remained standing. They claimed this plan would keep 55 million tons of CO_2 locked out of the air—which would, in time, justify their pumping an extra 55 million tons into the air from their coal and oil operations. AEP's internal documents boasted: "The Bolivian project…could save AEP billions of dollars in pollution controls."

Greenpeace sent an investigative team to see how it had turned out. The group found, in a report released last year, that some of the logging companies had simply picked up their machinery and moved to the next rainforest over. An employee for San Martin, one of the biggest logging companies in the area, bragged that nobody had ever asked if they had stopped. This is known as "leakage": one area is protected from logging, but the logging leaks a few miles away and continues just the same.

In fact, one major logging organization took the money it was paid by the project to quit and used it to cut down another part of the forest. The project had to admit it had saved 5.8 million tons or less—a tenth of the amount it had originally claimed. Greenpeace says even this is a huge overestimate. It's a Potemkin forest for the polluters.

When you claim an offset and it doesn't work, the climate is screwed twice over—first because the same amount of forest has been cut down after all, and second because a huge amount of additional warming gases has been pumped into the atmosphere on the assumption that the gases will be locked away by the now-dead trees. So the offset hasn't prevented emissions—it's doubled them. And as global warming increases, even the small patches of rainforest that have technically been preserved are doomed. Why? Rainforests have a very delicate humid ecosystem, and their moisture smothers any fire that breaks out, but with 2 degrees of warming, they begin to dry out—and burn down. Climatologist Wolfgang Cramer says we "risk losing the entire Amazon" if global warming reaches 4 degrees.

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About Your Professor

Dr. Paul Zeitz is Professor of Mathematics at the University of San Francisco. Professor Zeitz won the USA Mathematical Olympiad, was a member of the first American team to participate in the International Mathematical Olympiad, and has composed and edited problems for national math contests. Professor Zeitz is the winner of the Mathematical Association of America's national teaching award, the Deborah and Franklin Tepper Haimo Award.

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And the news gets worse. Carbon dioxide pumped out of a coal power station stays in the atmosphere for millenniums—so to genuinely "offset" it, you have to guarantee that a forest will stand for the same amount of time. This would be like Julius Caesar in 44 BC making commitments about what Barack Obama will do today—and what some unimaginable world leader will do in 6010. In practice, we can't even guarantee that the forests will still be standing in fifty years, given the very serious risk of runaway warming.

You would expect the major conservation groups to be railing against this absurd system and demanding a serious alternative built on real science. But on Capitol Hill and at Copenhagen, these groups have been some of the most passionate defenders of carbon offsetting. They say that, in "political reality," this is the only way to raise the cash for the rainforests, so we will have to work with it. But this is a strange kind of compromise—since it doesn't actually work.

In fact, some of the big groups lobbied to make the protections weaker, in a way that will cause the rainforests to die faster. To understand why, you have to grasp a distinction that may sound technical at first but is crucial. When you are paying to stop deforestation, there are different ways of measuring whether you are succeeding. You can take one small "subnational" area—like the Noel Kempff Climate Action Project—and save that. Or you can look at an entire country, and try to save a reasonable proportion of its forests. National targets are much better, because the leakage is much lower. With national targets, it's much harder for a logging company simply to move a few miles up the road and carry on: the move from Brazil to Congo or Indonesia is much heftier, and fewer loggers will make it.

Simon Lewis, a forestry expert at Leeds University, says, "There is no question that national targets are much more effective at preventing leakage and saving forest than subnational targets."

Yet several groups—like TNC and Conservation International—have lobbied for subnational targets to be at the core of REDD and the US climate bills. Thanks in part to their efforts, this has become official US government policy, and is at the heart of the Waxman-Markey bill. The groups issued a joint statement with some of the worst polluters—AEP, Duke Energy, the El Paso Corporation—saying they would call for subnational targets now, while vaguely aspiring to national targets at some point down the line. They want to preserve small patches (for a short while), not a whole nation's rainforest.

An insider who is employed by a leading green group and has seen firsthand how this works explained the groups' motivation: "It's because they will generate a lot of revenue this way. If there are national targets, the money runs through national governments. If there are subnational targets, the money runs through the people who control those forests—and that means TNC, Conservation International and the rest. Suddenly, these forests they run become assets, and they are worth billions in a carbon market as offsets. So they have a vested financial interest in offsetting and in subnational targets—even though they are much more environmentally damaging than the alternatives. They know it. It's shocking."

What are they doing to ensure that this policy happens—and the money flows their way? Another source, from a green group that refuses corporate cash, describes what she has witnessed behind closed doors. "In their lobbying, they always talk up the need for subnational projects and offsetting at every turn and say they're great. They don't mention national targets or the problems with offsetting at all. They also push it through their corporate partners, who have an army of lobbyists, [which are] far bigger than any environmental group. They promote their own interests as a group, not the interests of the environment." They have been caught, he says, "REDD-handed, too many times."

In Copenhagen, conservation groups pushed for policies that would bring environmental disaster—and financial benefits for themselves.

TNC and Conservation International admit they argue for subnational accounting, but they claim this is merely a "steppingstone" to national targets. Becky Chacko, director of climate policy at Conservation International, tells me, "Our only interest is to keep forests standing. We don't [take this position] because it generates revenue for us. We don't think it's an evil position to say money has to flow in order to keep forests standing, and these market mechanisms can contribute the money for that."

Yet when I ask her to explain how Conservation International justifies the conceptual holes in the entire system of offsetting, her answers become halting. She says the "issues of leakage and permanence" have been "resolved." But she will not say how. How can you guarantee a forest will stand for millenniums, to offset carbon emissions that warm the planet for millenniums? "We factor that risk into our calculations," she says mysteriously. She will concede that national accounting is "more rigorous" and says Conservation International supports achieving it "eventually."

There is a broad rumble of anger across the grassroots environmental movement at this position. "At Copenhagen, I couldn't believe what I was seeing," says Kevin Koenig of Amazon Watch, an organization that sides with indigenous peoples in the Amazon basin to preserve their land. "These groups are positioning themselves to be the middlemen in a carbon market. They are helping to set up, in effect, a global system of carbon laundering…that will give the impression of action, but no substance. You have to ask—are these conservation groups at all? They look much more like industry front groups to me."

So it has come to this. After decades of slowly creeping corporate corruption, some of the biggest environmental groups have remade themselves in the image of their corporate backers: they are putting profit before planet. They are supporting a system they know will lead to ecocide, because more revenue will run through

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their accounts, for a while, as the collapse occurs. At Copenhagen, their behavior was so shocking that Lumumba Di-Aping, the lead negotiator for the G-77 bloc of the world's rainforest-rich but cash-poor countries, compared them to the CIA at the height of the cold war, sabotaging whole nations.

How do we retrieve a real environmental movement, in the very short time we have left? Charles Komanoff worked as a consultant for the Natural Resources Defense Council for thirty years before quitting in disgust recently. He says, "We're close to a civil war in the environmental movement. For too long, all the oxygen in the room has been sucked out by this beast of these insider groups, who achieve almost nothing.… We need to create new organizations that represent the fundamentals of environmentalism and have real goals."

Some of the failing green groups can be reformed from within. The Sierra Club is a democratic organization, with the leadership appointed by its members. There are signs that members are beginning to put the organization right after the missteps of the past few years. Carl Pope is being replaced by Mike Brune, formerly of the Rainforest Action Network—a group much more aligned with the radical demands of the climate science. But other organizations—like Conservation International and TNC—seem incapable of internal reform and simply need to be shunned. They are not part of the environmental movement: they are polluter-funded leeches sucking on the flesh of environmentalism, leaving it weaker and depleted.

Already, shining alternatives are starting to rise up across America. In just a year, the brilliant 350.org has formed a huge network of enthusiastic activists who are demanding our politicians heed the real scientific advice—not the parody of it offered by the impostors. They have to displace the corrupt conservationists as the voice of American environmentalism, fast.

This will be a difficult and ugly fight, when we need all our energy to take on the forces of ecocide. But these conservation groups increasingly resemble the forces of ecocide draped in a green cloak. If we don't build a real, unwavering environmental movement soon, we had better get used to a new sound—of trees crashing down and an ocean rising, followed by the muffled, private applause of America's "conservationists." ■

Naji Hamdan's Nightmare

An American auto-parts businessman says he was tortured in the UAE—with US complicity.

by ANNA LOUIE SUSSMAN

Beirut, Lebanon

At only one point in his story did Naji Hamdan cry. Sitting in an office chair as he recounted how he was arrested, tortured and ultimately convicted of terrorism charges in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), his voice barely wavered. Only when he described how Emirati interrogators threatened to rape his wife in front of him if he did not confess to charges of supporting Al Qaeda did he lose control, pausing to accept a fistful of Kleenex before he continued his story.

CAITLIN DOVER

"For two weeks I could not stand on my feet. I had to use the help of a Nepali guard to drag me to the bathroom," he said of a period following a particularly brutal beating, around three weeks into his two-month detention.

Hamdan, 43, was born in Lebanon and moved to the United States in 1984. He studied aerospace engineering, worked at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) as an aircraft mechanic, then for Northrop Grumman, and eventually opened his own auto parts business, HondAcura Palace. In his downtime, he played soccer, camped and hiked, and as of 1992 began raising his son, Khaled. A few years later he became a naturalized citizen. A devout Sunni Muslim, he was active in the Muslim community and helped to found the Islamic Center of Hawthorne, in Southern California.

In 1999 the Federal Bureau of Investigation visited him at home, inquiring about a possible millennial terrorist attack. The bureau also interrogated others in the local Muslim community, asking whether they knew of any imminent plots.

"They asked if I knew any terrorists, would I go and tell them," said Hamdan. "Of course I would. My kids were going to school there. I have businesses there."

Hamdan's brother Hossam, who goes by the name Sam, got a visit too. At the time, he recalled, "We were like, What the hell are they talking about?"

The FBI kept Hamdan on its radar for the next ten years, contacting him, he estimates, on six occasions. Officials asked about his business, his political beliefs and whether he knew Osama bin Laden (he knew bin Laden as well as anyone else did at the time, "from the media," as he put it). During this time, air travel became increasingly difficult for him; he was often stopped and questioned for hours, on one occasion missing a flight out of LAX.

Hamdan moved his family to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates in 2006, where he hoped to expose his children to

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Islamic culture and the Arabic language, as well as the American culture of business and entrepreneurship. There, he thought, they could have "the best of both worlds." He had heard it was "more modern and developed" than the rest of the region.

"And peaceful," added his wife, a look of pained irony on her face.

Even after relocating, he continued to face harassment at airports and particularly on trips back to the United States, where he and Sam continued to operate the auto parts business. On one visit in March 2007, he says, he was interrogated at LAX for more than four hours, followed by SUVs with tinted windows and repeatedly photographed. He cut his trip short.

"They were kind of pushing me out of the country as if I'm not an American citizen anymore," he said. "And that is sad."

That treatment was gentle compared with the reception he got from the government of the United Arab Emirates. At noon on August 26, 2008, six weeks after FBI agents had summoned him for about four hours of interrogation at the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi, he got a call saying his car, parked downstairs from his apartment, had been in an accident. The sun shining, he went downstairs in shorts and a T-shirt (he had been napping) to check his vehicle. Emirati officials arrived on the scene, handcuffed and blindfolded him, and drove away in custom-made SUVs with tinted windows.

Held incommunicado for one month and twenty-three days, Hamdan says he was subject to near-daily beatings and torture for the first few weeks, after which the beatings slowed to every few days. In between he was left in total isolation.

"I don't know if it's a tactic or not," he said, "but it was painful also to leave me without even the guard talking to me."

The beatings were intended to elicit a confession of involvement with a rotating cast of terrorist groups that would change from one day to the next. Initially, Hamdan protested his innocence. But the threat against his wife was too much, and he broke down.

"The interrogator said, You're going to sign a confession that you're with Al Qaeda and put your fingerprint on it," Hamdan remembers. But a few days later, he was taken from his cell to another interrogator, who said he'd received information "from a friendly country" that Hamdan was supporting the Gaza-based Palestinian group Hamas.

"He said, You have to change your confession," said Hamdan. Still fearing for his wife, he told them, "Listen, I'll do whatever you want."

Hamdan quickly came to believe that his Emirati interrogators were acting at the behest of the United States; at one point they questioned him about his recent interview with the FBI at the embassy, asking him why he was tense during their meeting.

"I didn't think of it when I first got detained, but when the beatings started, I knew right away," he said.

During one interrogation, Hamdan said, he believed an American interrogator was present in the room. He identified the man by his accent and his dress, which differed from the rest of the interrogators, who were wearing either white robes, a traditional men's dress in the Gulf, or the uniform that high-ranking military officers wear.

"From underneath my blindfold, I could see feet. He had on gray suit pants and black dress shoes," said Hamdan, "and he had a pure American accent. I encountered the FBI several times before. I have no doubt he was FBI."

As UAE agents introduced him to their full spectrum of torture techniques (a freezing cold isolation room, an electric chair they sat him in and threatened to turn on, kicks and punches to his already frail liver), his family searched in vain to discover his whereabouts. His wife says she went to the State Security offices and was told they'd never heard of her husband. She also says she called the US Embassy and the State Department, where staff claimed they were unaware of his case. Hamdan's brother Sam said he called Joshua Stone, an FBI agent who had interviewed Hamdan in Abu Dhabi.

Held incommunicado for one month and twenty-three days, Hamdan was subject to near-daily beatings and torture for the first few weeks.

"They weren't interested in talking about him," Sam recalled. "If he really didn't know what was happening to Naji, he would have been more interested. He'd want to know more," he concluded. At one point, he suggested to Stone that perhaps Naji was suspected of stealing cars, since he dealt in used automobiles.

"The guy laughed and said, 'Criminally? It's not that,'" Sam said.

The Hamdan family reached out to the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a habeas corpus suit in a Washington, DC, district court in November 2008. Although the judge dismissed the case in August 2009, finding a lack of jurisdiction, the suit shone light on Hamdan's predicament for the first time and highlighted the responsibility of the US government to attend to the detention of one of its citizens.

"One month and twenty-three days," said Hamdan incredulously of the time he was held incommunicado. "Normally if [Abu Dhabi authorities] detain a US citizen, they should report it to the embassy right away. But they did not."

After that period, Hamdan met with Sean Cooper, the consular chief for the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Three days before they met, his captors took his measurements, and on the day of the meeting gave him a brand-new outfit—shoes, pants, a shirt, underwear and socks—and a warning: "You better behave, because if you tell them anything, you're coming back to us, and you know what's going to happen." Looking spiffy, he arrived to find three Emirati officials, who would be present throughout the interview. He tried to use body language to indicate to Cooper that all was not well.

"He asked if I was being mistreated," remembered Hamdan, "and as I said no, I would turn my face to the side. Later, when

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I saw him, he said he had no idea something was wrong."

After their meeting, the beatings stopped, although another month passed before Hamdan was transferred to criminal custody. According to his lawyer, Jennie Pasquarella of ACLU Southern California, instead of helping the Hamdans secure Naji's release, the US government put up "major roadblocks at every turn." She and her colleagues were unable to persuade lawmakers to take up Hamdan's case publicly (she imagines they were "skittish" about "championing the case of someone labeled a terrorist") and got "the runaround" both in Washington and the Emitates.

"Even Congress has had little success at obtaining information about people the US has asked other countries to detain. Although our government is responsible for their detention, there is a black hole of information about those cases," she said.

In April 2009 Pasquarella and her colleagues obtained a nugget of information about a prior case that shed light on the possible circumstances of Hamdan's arrest and detention. A Freedom of Information Act request filed by the British House of Commons All Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition turned up an e-mail from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement that read, "At this time [redacted] is the only one we can get to. He is currently being held by the UAE pending our ability to do a Extraordinary Rendition." This e-mail, and America's historically warm economic and diplomatic relationship with the UAE, suggests that collusion in the field of counterterrorism would not be unheard of. Hamdan, who was not being held by the US, could not have been subject to extraordinary rendition—in which suspects are transferred from US to foreign custody—but his arrest fits the profile of a "proxy detention," in which the United States requests that someone be taken into custody in a foreign country.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs in Washington, the United Arab Emirates office of the State Department, the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi and an Abu Dhabi government spokesman all declined to comment on the case. Laura Eimiller, a spokeswoman for the FBI's Los Angeles field office, said that the bureau does not confirm or deny investigating Hamdan, but she added that the US government did not request a proxy detention in Hamdan's case.

With Hamdan's trial approaching in Abu Dhabi Federal Supreme Court last year, the FBI continued to investigate his businesses in America. It subpoenaed Daniel Sieu, 49, a former customer of Hamdan's who is the executive director of the Los Angeles–based Asian Pacific Revolving Loan Fund. Sieu had made several small loans to Hamdan as he expanded his business and bought small parcels of real estate. In January 2009 the FBI asked Sieu for everything in his files on Hamdan, which he says consisted of "a few basic loan applications." He was never called in for questioning and has not gotten back any of the material he submitted.

"Naji is a very nice guy," he said. "I consider him a friend."

The FBI also pursued another friend of Naji's, Jehad Suliman, beginning in 2002 with interrogations at HondAcura Palace, where Suliman is the manager. In July 2009, as Hamdan's case was playing out in Abu Dhabi, Suliman estimates that roughly a dozen agents entered his home with a search warrant relating to MediCal fraud. They seized a number of possessions, including documents unrelated to MediCal that referred to Hamdan and HondAcura Palace.

On January 29 of this year, Pasquarella filed a FOIA request for further information on the government's activities related to the Hamdan brothers and Suliman, but she expects it will take substantial litigation before anything comes to light.

Ultimately, after five hearings in front of Abu Dhabi's Federal Supreme Court, Hamdan was convicted of support for and spreading of terrorism. The prosecutor's case relied on Hamdan's signed confessions and a transcript of a chat-room conversation from a jihadi website in which Hamdan says he was not even a participant. According to Hamdan, in the course of the trial, he was accused of membership in six different terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda, Ansar al-Islam of Iraq and Fatah al-Islam.

Sitting in their living room in his eighth-floor apartment in Mar Elias, a busy commercial neighborhood in Beirut, and discussing his verdict, Hamdan and his wife still have trouble accepting it. "How could he have had the time" to be involved with all of these groups, his wife wondered aloud, while running an international auto parts business?

> 'What bothers me most is the unfairness of it all.... I got beaten, tortured and forced to sign something I didn't even read.'

"They're six different organizations that are against each other," pointed out Hamdan.

Pasquarella, who was barred from attending one of the sessions on the pretext that the trial chamber's air-conditioning was broken, called the trial "a facade for political processes." A respected human rights lawyer in the UAE, who did not wish to be identified because of previous government harassment, said that while the UAE Supreme Court is generally independent, on national security issues it toes the government line.

According to Hamdan, the prosecutor had sought four counts of the death penalty and four counts of life imprisonment, which he was eligible for under the UAE 2004 anti-terrorism legislation. Instead, the court gave him an eighteen-month time-served sentence, essentially setting him free despite a finding of guilt.

"I knew I was not going to be acquitted, because it would show their guilt, but I was still hoping they would go back to their conscience and acquit me," he said resignedly. "I wasn't relieved at the sentence, though, because now I'm considered a terrorist."

After nine days and a bit of paperwork, he was deported to Lebanon.

Now he mostly spends his days with his wife, mother and son, relaxing and looking after his health. His father

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died in October 2008; Hamdan said he died of a heart attack upon hearing of his son's detention. Recently his brother Sam received a notice addressed to Naji that his aircraft mechanic's license was being rescinded by the Transportation Security Administration. Hamdan still suffers pains in his wrists, neck and shoulders from the beatings, and he is taking medication for his liver and kidneys. But it is the mental scars that most stubbornly refuse to heal.

"Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, just thinking about it," he said. "What bothers me the most is the unfairness of it all.... I got beaten, tortured and forced to sign something I didn't even read. I left all my wealth over there in that country, and I'm here, empty-handed, with these memories that are eating me alive." ■

In Defense of Deficits

A big deficit-reduction program would destroy the economy two years into the Great Crisis.

by JAMES K. GALBRAITH

The Simpson-Bowles Commission, just established by the president, will no doubt deliver an attack on Social Security and Medicare dressed up in the sanctimonious rhetoric of deficit reduction. (Back in his salad days, former Senator Alan Simpson was a regular schemer to cut Social Security.) The Obama spending freeze is another symbolic sacrifice to the deficit gods. Most observers believe neither will amount to much, and one can hope that they are right. But what would be the economic consequences if they did? The answer is that a big deficit-reduction program would destroy the economy, or what remains of it, two years into the Great Crisis.

CAITLIN DOVER

For this reason, the deficit phobia of Wall Street, the press, some economists and practically all politicians is one of the deepest dangers that we face. It's not just the old and the sick who are threatened; we all are. To cut current deficits without first rebuilding the economic engine of the private credit system is a sure path to stagnation, to a double-dip recession—even to a second Great Depression. To focus obsessively on cutting future deficits is also a path that will obstruct, not assist, what we need to do to re-establish strong growth and high employment.

To put things crudely, there are two ways to get the increase in total spending that we call "economic growth." One way is for government to spend. The other is for banks to lend. Leaving aside short-term adjustments like increased net exports or financial innovation, that's basically all there is. Governments and banks are the two entities with the power to create something from nothing. If total spending power is to grow, one or the other of these two great financial motors—public deficits or private loans—has to be in action.

For ordinary people, public budget deficits, despite their bad reputation, are much better than private loans. Deficits put money in private pockets. Private households get more cash. They own that cash free and clear, and they can spend it as they like. If they wish, they can also convert it into interest-earning government bonds or they can repay their debts. This is called an increase in "net financial wealth." Ordinary people benefit, but there is nothing in it for banks.

And this, in the simplest terms, explains the deficit phobia of Wall Street, the corporate media and the right-wing economists. Bankers don't like budget deficits because they compete with bank loans as a source of growth. When a bank makes a loan, cash balances in private hands also go up. But now the cash is not owned free and clear. There is a contractual obligation to pay interest and to repay principal. If the enterprise defaults, there may be an asset left over—a house or factory or company—that will then become the property of the bank. It's easy to see why bankers love private credit but hate public deficits.

All of this should be painfully obvious, but it is deeply obscure. It is obscure because legions of Wall Streeters—led notably in our time by Peter Peterson and his front man, former comptroller general David Walker, and including the Robert Rubin wing of the Democratic Party and numerous "bipartisan" enterprises like the Concord Coalition and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget—have labored mightily to confuse the issues. These spirits never uttered a single word of warning about the financial crisis, which originated on Wall Street under the noses of their bag men. But they constantly warn, quite falsely, that the government is a "super subprime" "Ponzi scheme," which it is not.

We also hear, from the same people, about the impending "bankruptcy" of Social Security, Medicare—even the United States itself. Or of the burden that public debts will "impose on our grandchildren." Or about "unfunded liabilities" supposedly facing us all. All of this forms part of one of the great misinformation campaigns of all time.

The misinformation is rooted in what many consider to be plain common sense. It may seem like homely wisdom, especially, to say that "just like the family, the government can't live beyond its means." But it's not. In these matters the public and

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private sectors differ on a very basic point. Your family needs income in order to pay its debts. Your government does not.

Private borrowers can and do default. They go bankrupt (a protection civilized societies afford them instead of debtors' prisons). Or if they have a mortgage, in most states they can simply walk away from their house if they can no longer continue to make payments on it.

With government, the risk of nonpayment does not exist. Government spends money (and pays interest) simply by typing numbers into a computer. Unlike private debtors, government does not need to have cash on hand. As the inspired amateur economist Warren Mosler likes to say, the person who writes Social Security checks at the Treasury does not have the phone number of the tax collector at the IRS. If you choose to pay taxes in cash, the government will give you a receipt—and shred the bills. Since it is the source of money, government can't run out.

It's true that government can spend imprudently. Too much spending, net of taxes, may lead to inflation, often via currency depreciation—though with the world in recession, that's not an immediate risk. Wasteful spending—on unnecessary military adventures, say—burns real resources. But no government can ever be forced to default on debts in a currency it controls. Public defaults happen only when governments don't control the currency in which they owe debts—as Argentina owed dollars or as Greece now (it hasn't defaulted yet) owes euros. But for true sovereigns, bankruptcy is an irrelevant concept. When Obama says, even offhand, that the United States is "out of money," he's talking nonsense—dangerous nonsense. One wonders if he believes it.

Nor is public debt a burden on future generations. It does not have to be repaid, and in practice it will never be repaid. Personal debts are generally settled during the lifetime of the debtor or at death, because one person cannot easily encumber another. But public debt does not ever have to be repaid. Governments do not die—except in war or revolution, and when that happens, their debts are generally moot anyway.

So the public debt simply increases from one year to the next. In the entire history of the United States it has done so, with budget deficits and increased public debt on all but about six very short occasions—with each surplus followed by a recession. Far from being a burden, these debts are the foundation of economic growth. Bonds owed by the government yield net income to the private sector, unlike all purely private debts, which merely transfer income from one part of the private sector to another.

Nor is that interest a solvency threat. A recent projection from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, based on Congressional Budget Office assumptions, has public-debt interest payments rising to 15 percent of GDP by 2050, with total debt to GDP at 300 percent. But that can't happen. If the interest were paid to people who then spent it on goods and services and job creation, it would be just like other public spending. Interest payments so enormous would affect the economy much like the mobilization for World War II. Long before you even got close to those scary ratios, you'd get full employment and rising inflation—pushing up GDP and, in turn, stabilizing the debt-to-GDP ratio. Or the Federal Reserve would stabilize the interest payouts, simply by keeping short-term interest rates (which it controls) very low.

What about indebtedness to foreigners? True, foreigners do us a favor by buying our bonds. To acquire them, China must export goods to us, not offset by equivalent imports. That is a cost to China. It's a cost Beijing is prepared to pay, for its own reasons: export industries promote learning, technology transfer and product quality improvement, and they provide jobs to migrants from the countryside. But that's China's business.

For China, the bonds themselves are a sterile hoard. There is almost nothing that Beijing can do with them. China already imports all the commodities and machinery and aircraft it can use—if it wanted more, it would buy them now. So unless China changes its export policy, its stock of T bonds will just go on growing. And we will pay interest on it, not with real effort but by typing numbers into computers. There is no burden associated with this, not now and not later. (If the Chinese hoard the interest, they also don't help much with job creation here. So the fact that we're buying a lot of goods from China simply means we have to be more imaginative, and bolder, if we want to create all the jobs we need.) Finally, could China dump its dollars? In principle it could, substituting Greek bonds for American and overpriced euros for cheap dollars. On brief reflection, no Beijing bureaucrat is likely to think this a smart move.

As government programs, Social Security and Medicare cannot go bankrupt—unless Congress cuts the benefits they provide.

What is true of government as a whole is also true of particular programs. Social Security and Medicare are government programs; they cannot go bankrupt, and they cannot fail to meet their obligations unless Congress decides—say on the recommendation of the Simpson-Bowles Commission—to cut the benefits they provide. The exercise of linking future benefits and projected payroll tax revenues is an accounting farce, done for political reasons. That farce was started by FDR as a way of protecting Social Security from cuts. But it has become a way of creating needless anxiety about these programs and of precluding sensible reforms, like expanding Medicare to those 55 and older, or even to the whole population.

Social Security and Medicare are transfer programs. What they do, mainly, is move resources around within our society at a given time. The principal transfer is not from the young to the old, since even without Social Security the old would still be around and someone would have to support them. Rather, Social Security pools resources, so that the work of the young collectively supports the senior population. The effective transfer is from parents who have children who would otherwise support them (a fairly rare thing), to seniors who don't. And it is from workers who do not have parents to support, to workers who

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would otherwise have to support their parents. In both cases this burden sharing is fair, progressive and sustainable. There is a healthcare cost problem, as everyone knows, but that's not a Medicare problem. It should not be solved by cutting back on healthcare for the old. Social Security and Medicare also replace private insurance with cheap and efficient public administration. This is another reason these programs are the hated targets, decade after decade, of the worst predators on Wall Street.

Public deficits and private lending are reciprocal. Increased private lending generates new tax revenue and smaller deficits; that's what happened in the 1990s. A credit collapse kills the tax base and generates more spending; that's what's happening now, and our big deficits are the accounting counterpart of the massive decline, last year, in private bank loans. The only choice is what kind of deficit to run—useful deficits that rebuild the country, as in the New Deal, or useless ones, with millions kept unnecessarily on unemployment insurance when they could instead be given jobs.

If we could revive private lending, should we do it? Well, yes, up to a point there is good reason to have a robust private lending sector. Government is by nature centralized and policy driven. It works by law and regulation. Decentralized and competitive private banks have much more flexibility. A good banking system, run by capable people with good business judgment who know their clients, is good for the economy. The fact that you have to pay interest on a loan is also an important motivator of investment over consumption.

But right now, we don't have functional big banks. We have a cartel run by an incompetent plutocracy, with its long fingers deep in the pockets of the state. For functional credit to return, we'll have to reduce the unpayable private debts now outstanding, to restore private incomes (meaning: create jobs) and collateral (meaning: home values), and we'll have to restructure the big banks. We need to break them up, shrink the financial sector overall, expose and prosecute frauds, and create incentives for profitable lending in energy conservation, infrastructure and other sectors. Or we could create a new parallel banking system, as was done in the New Deal with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and its spinoffs, including the Home Owners' Loan Corporation and later Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Either way, until we have effective financial reform, public budget deficits are the only way toward economic growth. You don't have to like budget deficits to realize that we must have them, on whatever scale necessary to restore growth and jobs. And we will need them not just now but for a long while, until we've shaped a strategic program for investment, energy and the environment, financed in part by a reformed, restored and disciplined financial sector.

It's possible, of course, that all the deficit hysteria is intended to divert attention from the dysfunctions of private banking, and so to help thwart calls for financial reform. Is that giving them too much credit? Maybe. Maybe not. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

People's History of the United States. We need to create a real democracy rather than "take back" an imaginary one. We need a constitutional amendment to overhaul the electoral process and ensure its integrity. As Lawrence Lessig states, Congress is no more likely to propose a constitutional amendment than to enact electoral reform. It falls to us, the citizens, to create an amendment and build the grassroots movement to force its adoption.

PHILIP ANDERSON, VALERIE KOZLOVSKY

VICTOR, N.Y.

Lawrence Lessig's analysis of our failing democracy needs to be Vulcan mind-melded into the brains of all Americans. Unless we join together to oppose the takeover of government by big money, we lose. As someone who has been advocating public funding of elections for four years, there is one tweak I must make to Lessig's strategy. We must turn back *Citizens United v. FEC* (most likely by constitutional amendment) *before* we enact public funding of elections. The order is very important. In states like Arizona where public funding is already law, special interest candidates can run using public money. Then their corporate godfathers tip the scales with devastating media buys during those sixty critical days before the election. Alas, with a single bang of the nation's weightiest gavel, the Supremes turned strong progressive electoral law into exactly what the right has tried to frame it to be—welfare for politicians.

SAM A. FEDELE

FAIRFAX, VA.

If the only way to fix our government is a constitutional amendment, we're in for an extended period of national grief. A faster (though less permanent) way of confronting the *Citizens United* decision might be through executive order. Is this a stretch? Perhaps, but we shouldn't forget that it was by executive order that President Bush designated Afghanistan as a combat zone and declared that the CIA's interrogation techniques fell outside the Geneva Conventions.

THOMAS I. SIEMSEN

WEST ORANGE, N.J.

Lessig's constitutional convention is a good approach. I propose that members of Congress be continuously measured against the will of the people. To do this, citizens must have the ability to "vote" on the bills online. Such a system would have to be centralized, neutral and truly reflect the will of the people. Votetocracy.com attempts to achieve just that.

DAVID KRALJIC

ARLINGTON, VA.

Lawrence Lessig suggests convening a constitutional convention but notes that getting approval of two-thirds of the states might not be easy. There is another alternative. Constitutional law professors Akhil Reed Amar at Yale and Alan Hirsch at Williams judge that "Article V merely sets forth one mode of amendment.... There also exists a separate means of amending the Constitution: a national referendum (of sorts) by We, the People."

ALLAN MATTHEWS

LOS ANGELES

The fundamental problem is that we can't have political democracy without economic democracy. Steps to achieving both are under way in South America and Europe. In our corporate state this is a harder challenge but one I believe we must face.

NINA BYERS

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Books & the Arts.

DOUG CHAYKA

Heroic Impatience

by DIEGO GAMBETTA

On April 20, 1998, Reuters in Cologne received a letter mailed from Chemnitz, near the border between Germany and the Czech Republic. It read, in part: "Nearly 28 years ago, on May 14, 1970, the RAF was born in a liberation action. Today we end this project. The urban guerrilla battle of the RAF is now history." A bizarre coincidence: April 20, 1998, was the 109th anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth.

The typewritten letter was anonymous and eight pages long—conciseness seldom being a virtue of violent extremists, even in the throes of dissolution. It was authenticated by the police on the basis of its style and paper. (Both had been used in previous communiqués by the group.) It also bore the group's emblem, a five-pointed star, with "RAF" (*Rote Armee Fraktion*, or "Red Army Faction") inscribed over a drawing of a Heckler & Koch submachine gun, a German-made weapon used by the military of the very state against which the RAF had declared war. The group had also been dubbed the Baader-Meinhof Gang by the media, after two of its main protagonists, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. (The press spotlighted Meinhof because she was a well-known journalist before she went underground.) As Stefan Aust explains in *Baader-Meinhof*, the Gang had intended to adorn its emblem with the image of a Kalashnikov, the Russian assault rifle and symbol of liberation movements around the world. Instead, it made a mistake that stuck.

Baader-Meinhof
The Inside Story of the RAF.
By Stefan Aust.
Translated by Anthea Bell.
Oxford. 457 pp. $29.95.

Everybody Talks About the Weather… We Don't
The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof.
Edited by Karin Bauer.
Translated by Luise von Flotow.
Seven Stories. 268 pp. Paper $16.95.

By the time the letter arrived at the Reuters Cologne bureau, the RAF's weapons had already been silent for seven years, since its assassination in Dusseldorf, on April 1, 1991, of Detlev Rohwedder, the head of the agency overseeing the privatization process in the former East Germany. A year later, in a letter

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mailed to Agence France-Presse, the RAF announced that it was suspending its guerrilla campaign and in return was asking for the release of its jailed comrades. This decision, the letter said, was due to a change of strategy after the fall of the Berlin Wall and disintegration of the Soviet bloc. It was also a response to the latest moves by Justice Minister Klaus Kinkel, who had indicated that the authorities might consider releasing RAF members.

The state kept its promise. It even released Irmgard Moeller, a member of the original Gang, despite American opposition and the lack of any signs of repentance on her part. Forty-seven years old when she left prison in 1994, Moeller had been serving a life sentence for participating in the 1972 bomb attack on the European headquarters of the US armed forces in Heidelberg that left three GIs dead. She was also a survivor of the infamous night of October 17, 1977, when her RAF comrades Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carle Raspe died in Stammheim prison in an apparent coordinated suicide. Moeller was found with several stab wounds in the region of her heart. Contrary to the official account of the night, she maintains they were not self-inflicted and that there was no suicide pact.

Horst Mahler, a member of the original Gang, went on to join the NDP, a neo-Nazi party.

After the Rohwedder murder, there were two more violent episodes involving RAF members, but neither had been planned by the Gang. In 1993 Birgit Hogefeld and Wolfgang Grams were ambushed by special squad officers at the train station in Bad Kleinen. Grams started firing as soon as he detected the police, and ended up killing an officer. Hogefeld was arrested. According to the authorities, Grams committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. Suspicions that he was actually shot by special squad officers sparked a furor among the public that culminated in the resignation of the German interior minister and the dismissal of the chief federal prosecutor.

The second episode, also involving a couple, took place in Vienna. Horst-Ludwig Meyer and Andrea Klump had been on the run for thirteen years, ever since they were wanted for the murder of Siemens executive Karl-Heinz Beckurts in Munich in November 1986. On September 15, 1999, Meyer was killed by Austrian police. From the description of the face-off in the London *Observer*, one can surmise that Meyer wanted a quick way to go, commensurate with his identity as an urban guerrilla. There was no reason for him to pull out his 9-millimeter Beretta pistol when a policewoman, tipped off by passers-by to the couple's strange behavior, asked to see their papers. They were carrying forged copies of Italian passports that had served them well for some time. The special unit was called. "After an exchange of about 10 shots," the *Observer* reported, Meyer was gunned down and Klump arrested.

Astrid Proll, a member of the original Gang, served time in a German prison for attempted murder and now works as a photo editor. She told the *Observer* that Meyer and Klump may not have been planning anything:

> My guess is that they were living as a couple and were still armed because they were on the run. They were hounded people who did not want to go to prison for fifteen years. Once they got into trouble they just behaved as terrorists, and now he is dead. I very much doubt they were into something. Everything is over. This kind of terrorism is something from the past.

Everything was truly over for the RAF, even though the group had not recanted its past actions or the use of violence for political goals. On the contrary, its 1998 communiqué ended on a bombastic note, citing Rosa Luxemburg's dictum "The revolution says: I was, I am, I will be."

In 1968, in the group's prehistory, Baader and Ensslin firebombed two department stores. From then to 1991, the RAF robbed banks; bombed police stations, army barracks and embassies; took hostages; and killed people. Some of its victims were mistakes or "collateral damage," others the result of unplanned shootouts with police. Many of its attacks were "endogenously" generated—that is, aimed at freeing jailed comrades. But there were also a number of purely politically motivated attacks and, most shocking of all, targeted assassinations of industrialists, administrators and judges.

According to Aust, during a quarter-century of activity, the RAF killed thirty-eight people. By any standard their lethality was minuscule—car crashes cause on average the same number of deaths every three hours on Europe's roads. Yet judging merely by the magnitude of the political and institutional storm the RAF precipitated, which rattled the establishment and brought tanks to the streets of West Germany, it proved supremely cost-effective. The tiny size of the RAF—seventy-five members are known to the police—makes its potency all the more striking.

At the time of this writing, three RAF members are still on the run. Six died in some violent episode before being arrested, and sixty-six have been caught and sentenced to jail over the years. Among the latter, six died of natural causes and seven committed suicide. Fifty-one have been released. Only Klump and Hogefeld remain behind bars. Nineteen members are dead, a rate of mortality that, considering their line of work, is not particularly high for their age group.

Most of those freed now lead quiet lives far from media scrutiny. Not Horst Mahler, whose claim to infamy has taken a surreal turn. A lawyer and member of the original Baader-Meinhof Gang, he later recanted terrorism and was released from jail early, in 1980. He went on to join the NDP, a neo-Nazi party. In February 2009—exactly sixty years after his father, "a fanatical Nazi and anti-Semite, had shot himself," Aust notes—Mahler, who is now 74, was sentenced to six years in jail for posting videos on the Internet denying the Holocaust and for distributing CDs promoting anti-Semitic hatred.

In 1972 I was a 20-year-old philosophy student in Turin, a hotbed of student-worker protest. The Red Brigades had started to kidnap people, mostly foremen and factory managers who, they thought, treated workers harshly. During the following three years, their repertoire extended to kneecapping and, eventually, assassinations. My reaction back then was disbelief. The means did not match any viable revolutionary end; also, the Brigades were ideologically at odds with true comrades, who do not wage war against individuals, whether judges, industrialists, trade unionists or journalists, and do not stoop to acting as mafia hit men or loony anarchists. They may have used violence, but as participants in a revolutionary or resistance war. I and several of my friends thought that the Brigades were innocent, and that the violent acts attributed to them were false flag operations by the fascists.

By 1975 we knew that we were wrong. That was when four *carabinieri* surrounded an isolated farmhouse near Acqui Terme in which the Red Brigades were holding Vallarino Gancia, owner of the eponymous wine company, who had been kidnapped for ransom. A *brigatista* named Margherita "Mara" Cagol and a male companion, who has never been identified, refused to surrender. They burst out of the farmhouse throwing hand

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grenades that wounded two *carabinieri*, one seriously. In the shootout that ensued, as the *brigatisti* were trying to escape, a *carabiniere* was killed. The unidentified companion vanished into the woods; Cagol was shot dead. Together with her husband, Renato Curcio, she had founded the Red Brigades. Gancia was freed unharmed.

What did they think they could achieve by picking such an asymmetric fight? Where is the rationality of having "six against 60 million," as Heinrich Böll described the Baader-Meinhof Gang? These unanswered questions were all the more existentially displacing considering that, albeit as a participant observer rather than a frontline rabble-rouser, I had also inhaled the zeitgeist of those tumultuous years. I had marched in the same demonstrations, sat through the same endless assemblies, loitered around the same factory and school gates. The difference was that, despite the bellicosity of some of our slogans, it never occurred to me that the situation was ripe for armed struggle.

The Red Army Faction seems even more incomprehensible than the Red Brigades.

The RAF seems even more incomprehensible than the Red Brigades. The Brigades had a membership more than twice the RAF's size. It was a proper organization, with a cell structure and a reasonably clear hierarchy. Its members, unlike those of the Baader-Meinhof, were not always fugitives. Many remained unknown to the police for years and were able to keep up a front as ordinary citizens. In West Germany there were other groups variously linked with the RAF—the June 2 Movement, Red Aid, the Socialist Patients' Collective (SPK, "patients" of the mental variety)—but the constellation of sympathizers and kindred spirits on which the RAF could count, though it oscillated over time, sometimes peaking after the deaths of RAF members, was far less populous than that of the Red Brigades.

At the same time, the revulsion of large sections of German public opinion of all social strata was strong. By contrast, significant portions of the Italian working class sympathized with the Red Brigades. Disgruntled old members of the Resistance, who felt the civil war against Nazi-fascism had never been properly concluded, supplied the *brigatisti* with arms they had stashed away in 1945. The Red Brigades were also of a different ideological temper, less interested in the anti-imperialist, internationalist struggle and parochially focused on Italian workers' conditions. Mario Moretti, one of the leaders, says that because of this difference, the two groups never managed to collaborate on any operations.

The RAF's fantasy of unleashing a revolution was even more farfetched than the Brigades'. Renate Riemeck, Meinhof's foster mother and a talented historian and peace activist, wrote an affectionate open letter to Meinhof that was published in *konkret*, the main left-wing magazine in West Germany, in November 1971, when Meinhof was on the run: "The Federal Republic is not the place for an urban guerrilla movement in the Latin American style. The country offers, at most, suitable conditions for a gangster drama." Paying no heed to Riemeck's entreaties, Meinhof, who had been close to her foster mother, issued a dismissive, haughty reply, imbued with a slightly demented Brechtian tone, which was found three weeks later in a garbage bin in a Berlin park.

During the 1960s Stefan Aust, now 63, was an editor for *konkret*. Its publisher was Klaus Rainer Röhl, the husband of Meinhof, who was also an editor at the magazine. Aust, who was later the editor in chief of *Der Spiegel*, has had various professional and personal contacts, not always of a friendly nature, with several of the RAF's protagonists. *Baader-Meinhof*, published in 1985 in German and now available in an updated edition in German and English, covers the years 1967-77. Aust does not offer a decisive account of the RAF's origins and actions. He modestly refrains from advancing a particular narrative, wisely accepting that there may not be just one. The book's strength lies in its large number of interviews (often firsthand) and its numerous and varied sources, as well as its immediate, fast-paced style. The book is very readable, at times gripping. But it is organized into many short, discontinuous sections and has a hopscotch timeline, which can make it hard to know exactly when something happened or was said. Still, it is possible to extract, if not the whole picture of the RAF, at least many meaningful fragments.

One discovers, for instance, that Meinhof, by far the most interesting and culturally sophisticated character of the group, was herself struggling, ex post facto, with how to make rational sense of the RAF. She was arrested in 1972 for various terrorist-related crimes, and while in jail in late 1973 she started to write a history of the group. This was perhaps a sign of exaggerated self-importance, given that the group had been in existence for a mere two years before its core members were arrested. But it also demonstrates the need to reflect on and explain what they had done. Meinhof's foster mother, in her letter, had acutely pointed out that a "spirit of sacrifice and the readiness to face death become ends in themselves if one cannot make them understood." In her notes for the history, Meinhof, speaking in the third person plural, wrote:

> Not because they were so blind as to believe they could keep that initiative going until the revolution triumphed in Germany, not because they imagined they could not be shot or arrested.
>
> Not because they so misjudged the situation as to think the masses would simply rise at such a signal.
>
> It was a matter of salvaging, historically, the whole state of understanding attained by the movement of 1967/1968; it was a case of not letting the struggle fall apart again.

She must have felt the need to deny the suspicion that the RAF's members were blind and wrongheaded, incapable of thinking rationally about what they were doing. Instead she claims they were aiming at something else that cannot be measured in ordinary terms. The exact nature of this something else, however, is unclear. There is a marked contrast between the searching questions implicit in her denials and the vagueness of her answer—"salvaging…the whole state of understanding." She seems desperate to rescue the RAF's project from going down in history as an episode driven by strategic lunacy.

Meinhof never completed her history of the group. In fact, one can surmise that sometime in 1974 she began to go quietly mad. She had been in solitary confinement for more than a year. This must have weighed heavily on her mental state, combined with the difficulties of tracing her trajectory. Her writings become intermittently incoherent—for instance, when she describes her fraught relation with Baader or launches into abject self-criticism for having doubts. She inexplicably suspends contact with her twin daughters, who had been visiting and writing to her.

She would never see them again. After two more years of increasingly difficult relations with the rest of the group (in particular Ensslin, with whom she sometimes shared a cell), Meinhof could no longer bear her doubts, her sense of guilt about having entertained them

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and the way her comrades tormented her for having them. She hanged herself in her cell the night of May 8, 1976. She was too intelligent not to feel troubled by the folly of it all, too honest to deceive herself about what she felt—her husband described her after they first met as "the incarnation of intellectual honesty." Yet she was too blindly loyal to the group, or perhaps too weak, to defect, "even when the group no longer stood behind her." The group satisfied a deep human need in her to belong: "TV appearances, contacts, public attention"—she wrote in a letter to an undisclosed recipient sometime in the 1960s—"are part of my career as a journalist and a socialist and give me access to radio and television beyond *konkret*. It's all agreeable on a human level, but doesn't fulfill my need for human warmth, solidarity, and belonging to a group."

Andreas Baader cheated during hunger strikes while heaping scorn on wavering comrades.

Aust's book leaves no doubt that the group's "quasi-religious," "deranged crusade" managed to achieve nothing of whatever had been intended. Still, the one thing the RAF did somehow accomplish, all the more puzzling given its tiny number and gangsterlike lethality, was to strike fear into the heart of the Federal Republic. As Wolfgang Kraushaar, a political scientist who has edited a history of the RAF, said in an interview with the *Independent on Sunday* in 2007, "You have to remember that this period represents the greatest challenge Germany ever faced between the end of the War and the fall of Communism. The RAF—or Baader-Meinhof gang—essentially held the German state to ransom. It was a frightening time for the country." Democratic states are generally more vulnerable to terrorist tactics, and the Federal Republic was more vulnerable still because it was untested, haunted by a dreadful past and conceived under the tutelage of the victors.

Here I see a monumental paradox: the Baader-Meinhof Gang managed to perturb West German political institutions because the state was not what the Baader-Meinhof Gang claimed it to be. One of the RAF's ploys was to provoke the state "into showing its cunningly hidden and well-camouflaged 'true fascist face.'" Once the members of the Gang had been incarcerated, the German state seemed at first to oblige: it unnecessarily subjected them to harsh penal conditions—isolation, sound deprivation, white furniture, perpetually lit rooms. Still, these tactics, for all the physical and mental distress they may have caused, represent not unabashed use of force but muted alternatives, weaker substitutes. West Germany was, as Aust says, "a reasonably well-functioning constitutional state." If the state had had a "true fascist face" to reveal, matters would have been very different. We might not even know about the RAF, since freedom of the press would have been curtailed and secret executions would have replaced trials. By contrast, thanks to intense media coverage, the Gang's terror effect was multiplied and broadcast far and wide. "At no time of the 'underground struggle,'" Aust writes, "did the RAF have so magnetic a power of attraction as they did when imprisoned. Once in prison, the group developed a political stature it had previously lacked. The larger-than-life security precautions endowed the prisoners with a political significance they had never come near achieving with their writings and actions."

The RAF's attitude was reminiscent of a teen tantrum: *The state is bad; it deserves to be hit hard. Instead of a pat on our head it responds by shooting us when shot at, arresting and putting us in jail! Bastards! Fascists! You see, we were right all along. The state is so very fascist! Free the comrades! Avenge the fallen!* Lots of people on the German left were seduced by the Gang's *Sturm und Drang*. But it wasn't true. At his trial Baader was an irrepressible whiner: he compared the policy of the federal prosecutor's office toward the RAF to the "terrorist" policies of Israel toward the Palestinians, to the United States in Vietnam and the Pinochet junta in Chile. He said, "Its basic rule being as many dead fighters as possible, as many dead prisoners as possible, executions in the open street, shooting to kill, and so on." Yet Baader was allowed to make that farcical parallel because he was alive and free to speak and be heard. The police had used restraint when they surrounded Baader and Holger Meins in a garage and arrested them in June 1972. Baader's speeches had an effect only because the press was allowed to attend and report on the trial. In jail the RAF members "compared themselves with the inmates of Nazi concentration camps," Aust writes, a comparison at once laughable and offensive to the millions who died in the camps. Yet people outside saw the picture of Meins's arrest: "TV cameras were rolling. The picture of the skinny, almost naked figure of Holger Meins went around the world. And RAF sympathisers, or those close to them, were reminded of the pictures of concentration camp inmates. The myth of the pitiless persecution of the RAF warriors had been born." One wonders if Mahler learned something from those days: his six-year jail sentence for denying the Holocaust came from a court case he brought against himself, in order to use the courtroom as a stage.

In science, before one finds a good explanation of a phenomenon there are no such things as trivia. Instead there are anomalies, things either contrary to commonsensical expectations or that stand out as peculiar or unique. They are often uninformative quirks, yet at times anomalies turn out to be apertures to unexpected insights. Here I describe anomalies plucked from Aust's book, even though I am not sure to which of the two categories they belong.

Baader was a dropout, unlike the Gang's other main members, who were university educated: Mahler had a law degree, Meinhof a degree in psychology and pedagogy, Raspe one in sociology. Baader had a past as a petty criminal, a taste for "boozing and brawling" and was confined to a young offender institution and an adult prison for stealing a motorbike and driving without a license. He was released in 1967, just in time to catch the wave of student protests, and perhaps also a screening of a new film called *Bonnie and Clyde*.

He could be unpredictably kind or brutal, generous or mean. He was fond of Mickey Mouse comic books, *pace* American cultural imperialism; he cheated during hunger strikes at Stammheim in 1974, eating secretly while heaping scorn on wavering comrades. But unlike many manipulative people, he was also an exceptionally hard man: he never recanted, never displayed any weakness and remained defiant of authority till the very end. "It still amazes me," said chief commissioner Horst Herold after the siege in which Baader and his comrades were captured, "that they then ventured to fire. They must have been aware they were sitting on a powder keg."

The two lead women, while different from both Baader and each other, also had some peculiarities in common. Ensslin was the daughter of a Protestant pastor. Meinhof was descended on her father's side from "an old Württemberg family, notable for producing Protestant theologians," and who couldn't have been amused when Meinhof's mother, after her husband's death, went to live with Renate Riemeck, her female lover,

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who later became Meinhof's foster mother. Meinhof says she was a Christian pacifist until she joined the Communist Party in East Berlin in 1959 (the party was banned in the FDR), a time when communists in Western Europe were leaving the party in the wake of the brutal suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprisings.

Ensslin and Meinhof could respond very emotionally to oppression and social injustice. Ensslin wept "uncontrollably" when a student named Benno Ohnesorg was shot by a policeman during a demonstration in West Berlin against the Shah of Iran. Meinhof, while watching "dreadful pictures from Vietnam" on TV, "jumped up and said no one was going to do this *to her*, it debased everyone. We must act, she said, we couldn't just sit around doing nothing" (my emphasis). At Meinhof's funeral, the theologian Helmut Gollwitzer said, "I see this woman whose life was hard, who made her life hard *by allowing the misery of others to affect her so much*.... I see her now in the peace of the love of God" (my emphasis).

Still, like Ensslin and Baader before her, Meinhof abandoned her children in pursuit of her ideological ends; she was even prepared to ship them off to a Palestinian orphanage camp in Jordan rather than allow their father, Klaus Rainer Röhl, to look after them. (Aust, a friend of Röhl's, rescued the children, tricking some "comrades" in Sicily where the girls had been temporarily hidden during a leg of their trip to Jordan. He recounts how he barely managed to escape Baader's murderous vengeance.) If Meinhof was affected by the misery of others, she was not so affected by that which she herself caused. Her attitude is reminiscent of Mrs. Jellyby, the "telescopic philanthropist" memorably described by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*, who allows her children to live in squalor while devoting herself to solving social problems in Africa.

Ensslin was besotted with Baader, even during their dramatic years in detention (1972-77), when she worshiped him like a cult figure. "The rival, absolute enemy, enemy of the state: the collective consciousness, the morale of the humiliated and insulted, of the urban proletariat—that's what Andreas is," she wrote in a letter to Margrit Schiller, also an RAF member in prison. "We could measure ourselves by Andreas." She called him "baby"; he reciprocated by calling her "cunt." To avoid injustice, he called the other women by the same epithet. The Baader-Ensslin pairing propelled the group and welded it together.

Composed of approximately forty men and thirty-five women, the RAF had an astonishing gender balance, which is hard to find in any institution, let alone one specializing in extremist violence. This anomaly is interesting. Although they have used women as suicide bombers, Islamic extremists include none at all among their cadres. Right-wing violent groups have only a few. Women have a presence only in left-wing extremist groups: 30 percent of FARC fighters are women, and 25 percent of Red Brigades members were women. Even compared with these groups, the RAF was unique. Moretti recounts in his memoir that the Brigades once arranged with the RAF for their emissaries to meet at Milan's Central Station. The agreed identification signal was a thriller book carried in full view. The *brigatista* sent to the rendezvous returned from the station saying that he had seen no one holding a thriller in view—except a few women. He never expected to find his Teutonic kindred spirits incarnated in the bodies of three women. "We rushed back looking for them," Moretti says, "and did not tell them that the first appointment had fallen through because of a macho prejudice. We were not sure they would have found it as funny as we did."

There never was a proper plan to set up the Gang. As Meinhof wrote in the notes for her RAF history, the group's emergence was "spontaneous." The banding together of such diverse characters emanates a strong sense of *evitability*. As in the game of Shanghai sticks, drop the names of the main protagonists on the table a hundred times, and they will never form the same pattern twice. Remove just one of them, and the group trajectory would change. Despite the group's moniker, the members were the very opposite of an army in which individuals are interchangeable.

Contrary to what we may be tempted to expect, highly salient outcomes are not necessarily the result of big, chunky causes. They can—as Milan Kundera says of Anna Karenina's decision to kill herself—come out of a "conspiracy of details." Here I can piece some such details together.

One, the spark: on April 2, 1968, Baader and Ensslin decide to live up to the student movement's violent, anticapitalist slogans and torch two department stores. "The fascist state" catches them and puts them in jail. Two, the encounters: Meinhof reports on their trial for *konkret* and later interviews Ensslin in jail. Mahler is a defense lawyer for Baader in the trial for arson, for which they are sentenced to three years. Raspe's girlfriend Marianne happens to be a friend of Meinhof's. During the months in which Baader and Ensslin are freed pending an appeal (which they lose), Meinhof, Ensslin and Baader meet again through their shared interest in institutionalized youth. Three, the fugitives: Baader and Ensslin flee to avoid being jailed again. They knock on Meinhof's door. She agrees to hide them. Four, the escape: Baader is caught, and the plan to free him is hatched. (Until now there had been no talk of engaging in armed struggle.) Mein-

Dear K

(Not of the republic is this the day of beginning.)

And if it is not yet spoken, this day, what it is
if I cannot speak about it, to you, my love,
to anyone, of the picture, time of here
and time to come, how long the beginning
the after of any season, how to count on it
I do not know. The poem inclines
to restless thought: the night relentless
the heavens unimaginably vast. I cannot speak
of else that troubles me but that this
appears, needs to be worded, to you, to someone
but to you above all, the sky in January
crowded with lights, we saw them, on our back
on a deck, and the sea nearby, flowing and going.

MARK McMORRIS

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hof takes part in the "liberation action"; she pretends she is writing a book with Baader so the authorities will agree to have him taken under escort to an institute library where they can work together. Five, the shots: during the escape operation, an innocent institute employee is seriously wounded. Six, the jump: Meinhof is meant to stay behind, maintaining her pretense of innocence—her daughters are at school, and she has not entrusted them to anyone—but, in a metaphorical gesture, she decides to follow the example of institute runaways by jumping out of a window. According to Karin Bauer, the editor of *Everybody Talks About the Weather… We Don't*, "Likely, she panicked when shots were fired."

The Baader-Meinhof Gang turned the conspiracy of details into an act of the will.

Meinhof jumped on May 14, 1970. From that moment onward, the conspiracy of details turns into one of the will, and the planning to develop the armed struggle begins. On June 5 the fugitives issue their first communiqué, a founding declaration at once defiant and exalted. But now they are fugitives, known to the police, and that is not the most comfortable position to be in if you want to organize a revolutionary army.

They were on the run, and a host of mechanisms kicked in and began to govern their actions "more than any strategic notions of their aims."

After Baader's escape, the Gang's first feats were a choreographed simultaneous triplet of bank raids—"expropriation" exercises—in Berlin in September 1970. Life on the run is expensive, as Aust notes. The path of the fugitive guerrillas is dense not just with constraints but also with insidious mental traps, which affect their ability to make considered decisions. Aust explains that Volker Speitel, a young graphic artist who joined the RAF in 1974, later said that during his life in illegality "he was afraid the group might plunge into rash ventures in the grip of their persecution mania. 'Somebody [in the group] once said his fear of taking action was growing every day, so he would like to take action at once, and then he would be rid of his fear.'"

Forces other than the lofty goals proclaimed by the communiqués kept the Gang together and made it alluring to new recruits:

The thrill. Beate Sturm recollected, "We didn't really ask ourselves what we were actually looking for any more. You just slip into that sort of thing. And as we thought we knew we'd got into all this for the correct political reasons, we liked the thrill of it too." "There's adventure, wild, exciting driving, you're going into action in a minor way against anything that comes along," said one RAF recruit from a young people's home, "getting the better of a waiter in a café, getting the better of this or that liberal shit. There's always something going on with the Baader group. That is why all the young people are drawn to them."

The self-reinforcing beliefs. Ulrich Scholze joined the group when he was 23 and a tutor in the physics department of the Free University. Aust reports Scholze's analysis of what it took to join the RAF: "You have to be emotionally convinced that all attempts at reform simply stabilise the present system of society and consolidate capitalism. And the harmony of reason and emotions which then exists is the pre-condition of resolute action. Then the prosecuting authorities put pressure on you, *and that confirms all you thought*" (my emphasis). More illogical still: "When the Socialist Patients' Collective (SPK) in Heidelberg heard the news of Petra Schelm's death [in a shootout with the police in July 1971], its members *felt confirmed in their view* that it was necessary to go underground" (my emphasis).

The fame. Scholze also had this to say on what helps an urban guerrilla to stay the course: "The sensational press reports and descriptions such as 'Public Enemy Number 1' from government sources create *a feeling of success that gives you the strength to carry on*" (my emphasis).

Fear of shame or ostracism. This kept members from defecting. Klaus Jünschke, a psychology student who joined in 1971 via the SPK, later said, "It was only too clear to most members of the group that there could be nothing but prison or death at the end of their road. Many of them had doubts, and thought of getting out, but they were all afraid of telling anyone else, even though that person might be thinking just the same."

The reinforcement of the leadership. This typically accompanies life under great pressure, and made deliberative democracy within the group impossible. Proll reports that Meinhof once told her, "I'm fed up with this. All this hanging around, acting as lookout, checking out cars. I don't want to end up in jail for that kind of thing, not anymore, not for such petty details." According to Aust, Proll felt the same, "but the group wouldn't tolerate any discussion. Now that they had gone underground, the authority of the two leaders, Baader and Ensslin, was even more powerful than before."

The solidarity effect. When news of the arrest of Baader and Meins spread, Peter Jürgen Boock realized he had to go underground: "We must go into action.… They got me out of a hole [Baader and Ensslin befriended Boock when he was in a juvenile delinquent home]. Now it's up to me to get them out of one." Many actions by the RAF, especially beginning in 1975, when its second generation went into action, aimed to redress the failures of previous actions by freeing the comrades in jail. For example, the attack on the German Embassy in Stockholm (April 1975), the attack on the OPEC conference in Vienna (December 1975) and the kidnapping of Hanns-Martin Schleyer (September 1977) were all aimed at freeing the old guard in prison.

The martyr effect. Every "on the job" death has an impact not only on the surviving members but also on potential recruits who already sympathize with the cause and are spurred into action. Ulrike Meinhof, We Will Avenge You, read banners carried by mourners in West Berlin on the day of Meinhof's burial. This is a fairly general mechanism—we find traces of this effect among entities as different as the Palermo judges who fought against the mafia since the 1980s and organizations that practice suicide attacks. The "martyr effect" was very strong for the RAF. The death of Meins by hunger strike, for instance, gave the RAF a boost: the number of affiliates the police were looking for spiked to 300 from forty. Experts estimated that the sympathizers grew to more than 10,000.

Although Germany and Italy were and have remained democratic countries, the possible resurgence of fascism—which worried not only the RAF but the student movement in its entirety—did not seem farfetched at the time. And for good reasons. Many people in the postwar establishments of both countries—judges, industrialists, academics and politicians—were compromised by contact with the Third Reich or Mussolini's regime. In Germany, the leader of the grand coalition between the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party was Kurt Georg Kiesinger, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and worked on radio propaganda during the war. Portugal and Spain were still ruled by fascist dictatorships. Further, in 1967, when the student

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movements around the world erupted, there was a coup d'état in Greece that inaugurated a series of ultra-right-wing military governments ending in July 1974.

One can retort: but these things were not going to happen in Germany, where the Allies still ran the show. Well, I'm not so sure. In 1973 there was a coup d'état against the socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile, and it was backed by the United States, which had not complained about the coup in Greece. The Americans (and the British) were prepared to do anything to defend their freedom against communism, including supporting fascism. True, left-wing rhetoric traded in sensationalist parallels, equating too many events around the world to the Holocaust; it mistook incompetence, occasional police brutality and niches of authoritarianism in public institutions as the rumblings of fascism's imminent resurgence. Still, even if it is hard to get the balance right, it was far from ludicrous to entertain those fears. The Germans and the Italians of my generation may have been overheated. I wonder whether it is the Italians of today who aren't numbed and uncomprehending in front of the risk of resurgent neofascism masked by Silvio Berlusconi's clownish face.

In postwar Europe, however, we are grappling with a more precise question. Although many were worried about fascism and its viral representatives hidden in the neodemocratic states, only a handful leapt into armed struggle. Why did Meinhof jump out of that window? Why did I not even think of jumping? It is in the shadow of Germany's past that we need to look for an answer, because that is where the thinking protagonists of the RAF looked. As Meinhof wrote in a column in *konkret* in 1961 titled "Hitler Within You," they were members of a generation that "was not involved in the crimes of the Third Reich or in determining the direction that was taken in the postwar period; it has grown up with and into the arguments of the present, entangled in the blame for something it is not responsible for." Even if technically blameless, being the children of a certain generation of Germans exerted a great and special pressure.

Most people put up with it and got on with their lives. Some people, very few, developed an urgency for action, a "heroic impatience"—as a psychiatrist described a trait of Ensslin's personality—to ensure that the bitterly disappointing world around them could be forced to live up to their ideals. They become possessed of a sacred fury, intolerant of nuances or delays. The past is what truly weighs on them and makes their present unbearable. Rather than the future they imagine, it is the past that they know—the past within shouting historical distance, as it were, the source of emotions raw enough to spawn actions that plain rationality would deem ill-advised.

In *Sentimental Education*, Flaubert describes this syndrome, whose deep sources I do not really understand, when he portrays Sénécal, the only one in the circle of friends who in the 1848 Revolution ends up taking violent action:

> Sénécal was a tutor in mathematics, a hard-headed man of republican convictions, a future Saint-Just.... He was a man of theories, who cared only about the masses, but showed no mercy for the individuals...waking up every morning hoping for a revolution which would change the world in a few weeks. In the end, disheartened by the laxness of his brethren, furious for the delays that impeded the realization of his dreams, and desperate for his country, he joined as a chemist the plot of the incendiary bombs; and he was caught carrying gunpowder, which he was planning to employ in Montmartre, in a supreme attempt to establish the Republic.

It is unlikely that Baader was of this type, but Ensslin and Meinhof were. Remember what Meinhof said when she was watching scenes of Vietnamese horror on TV: they cannot do this to me. The casualty she perceives is her own self. A person with such a hyper-moral and brittle ego may succumb more easily to the pressure of distinguishing herself from the faults of others, and those of the previous generation in particular. How do I prove (to myself and others) that if I had lived under the Third Reich I would not have been supine or complicit? In "Hilter Within You" Meinhof wrote, "One day we will be asked about Herr Strauss [Franz Joseph, a right-wing Bavarian politician] in the same way we now ask our parents about Hitler." Strauss is like Hitler, Vietnam like Auschwitz, we like our parents: the past seems all one single catastrophe, as Walter Benjamin thought it did to the figure in Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*. At some point the pressure to rid oneself of the burden of the past becomes unbearable; the wreckage keeps piling up at one's feet, and acts of violence become the only perceived exit.

The most startling words in Aust's book were uttered by the father of Gudrun Ensslin, the Protestant pastor who was interviewed when his daughter was on trial for arson.

> Well, I—like the whole Federal Republic—would object to any admonishments made in that way. However, what she wanted to say is this: a generation that has seen the building of concentration camps, the encouragement of anti-Semitism and the committing of genocide among and in the name of its own people must not allow any revival of such things, must not admit that hope of a new beginning, of reformation and rebirth can come to nothing. These are young people who are not willing to go on swallowing frustration and be corrupted by it. It has astonished me to find that Gudrun, who has always thought in a very rational, intelligent way, has experienced what is almost a condition of euphoric self-realisation, a really holy self-realisation such as we find mentioned in connection with saints. To me, that is more of a beacon light than the fire of the arson itself—seeing a human being make her way to self-realisation through such acts.

Even if perhaps tinted by a father's desire not to disown his daughter, Pastor Ensslin's arguments are nonetheless striking. Here we have it all. The guilt over Germany's Nazi past, the fear of its revival and the quasi-religious, utterly irrational belief that only a gesture as dramatic as the fire his daughter kindled could provide catharsis. Pastor Ensslin defends not the rational, reflective self that Gudrun was known for but the abandonment of that, her transmogrification into a euphoric state that could lift the burden of the past and truly bear witness of rebirth.

The Gang turned the conspiracy of details into an act of the will. There is an almost Nietzschean *delirium omnipotentiae* in what they attempted: even though the conflict between the student movement and the German state could not seriously be compared with liberation conflicts such as that in Palestine, and even though there was no armed organization to rely on, they set out to create both. This, I think, is what gives these tragic *Übermenschen* and *Überfrauen* their sense of historical *evitability*—the fact that the forces pushing them in the direction they took were well short of inexorable.

Aust accepts the official version of Baader's, Ensslin's and Raspe's death: they committed coordinated suicides during the night and morning of October 17 and 18, 1977, in their cells in Stammheim prison. Baader and Raspe shot

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themselves with handguns apparently smuggled in by their lawyers. Ensslin hanged herself. They faced the prospect of spending their lives in prison—at their trial, which lasted for 192 days, life was the sentence. The hijacking of a Lufthansa jet by Palestinian insurgents demanding the Gang's release had ended on October 17 with the death or capture of the hijackers and the rescue of the hostages. The prisoners must have heard of this, and so knew their hopes were over. They also knew that Helmut Schmidt's government was not going to yield to the demands for their release made by the RAF cell that since September 5 had been holding hostage Hanns-Martin Schleyer, a prominent industrialist and former Nazi. The RAF murdered Schleyer after learning of the coordinated suicides.

Aust has indirect evidence to support the suicide hypothesis, showing that "the legend of the murders in Stammheim was born outside the group, not in its inner circle." He relies on the stern words that Brigitte Mohnhaupt apparently delivered to the stunned RAF members who were in hiding in Baghdad when the news reached them. Mohnhaupt participated in the Schleyer abduction and was one of the few members of the RAF's second generation to have met the old guard and to know how the guns had been smuggled into the prison. We do not know Aust's source, but this is how he reports her words:

> I suppose you lot can only suppose that they were victims. You didn't know them. They're not victims and they never were. You don't get made a victim, you have to make yourself a victim. They were in charge of their situation themselves right up to the last minute. So what does that mean? I'll tell you: it means they did it themselves, not that it was done to them.

Aust, however, also reports several unanswered questions about what really happened that night in Stammheim, and castigates the authorities for not being forthcoming and eliminating all doubts. It is baffling that none of the regular prisoners who were in their cells on the floor below heard any of the four shots that night. If the authorities ever admit to eavesdropping on the cells, as seems likely they did, and if they release the tapes, we may be in for some surprises.

For the time being, the account we have is that on the night of October 17 the *Sturm und Drang* tantrum reached its self-destructive climax. Baader, Ensslin and Raspe agreed to die and decided to make it seem as if they were the victims of an extrajudicial execution: *The fascist pigs are pretending not to be fascist pigs; let's show everyone what they are really capable of—let's die and teach them a lesson.* They left no notes behind. Baader fired a couple of aimless shots in his cell before shooting himself in the head from behind to make it seem, according to Aust, as if there had been a scuffle before his execution. This may sound farfetched. Yet it is consistent with the group mentality. "When their cells in Stammheim prison were being cleared," Aust writes, "a copy of Bertolt Brecht's play *The Measures Taken*, from which they kept quoting in their letters, was found in almost all of them. The play contained the creed of the RAF, talking of the absolute will to change the 'murdering world' by murders of their own and, if need be, by suicide. 'We are the missile,' they had written." ■

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Hichem Yacoubi as Reyeb (left) and Tahar Rahim as Malik in *A Prophet*

Vision or Blindness?

by STUART KLAWANS

Jacques Audiard has never made a bad movie, but neither has he made many of them. Five films in fifteen years: it's a pace that might make you suspect him of harboring eccentric ambitions, or just being fussy, if he weren't so obviously in love with genre storytelling. Four of his films, the new one included, are crime pictures; the fifth might be classified as a caper; and though all are stylish, they're realized with such swift story development and emotionally direct acting that they give at least an impression of spontaneity, as if Audiard and his protagonists had figured out the plots together, on the run.

Perhaps "figured out" is an exaggeration. Audiard's principal characters bluff, blunder and scheme their way through situations that have every appearance of being too much for them, given their patent frailties. Even the ex-con in *Read My Lips*, paroled into a flunky office job, could be overmastered by a copying machine—and he was played by the one real tough guy among Audiard's actors, Vincent Cassel. (The heroine in that film was profoundly deaf and so had problems of her own, for which the tough-gal attitude of Emmanuelle Devos could not entirely compensate.) In Audiard's other crime movies, his lead actors have been a neurotic, inward Romain Duris in *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (a remake of James Toback's *Fingers*, and for my money a considerable improvement on it) and the unmistakably homoerotic pair of Jean-Louis Trintignant and Mathieu Kassovitz in *See How They Fall*: Trintignant looking as fragrant and winning as a leather jacket salvaged from a garbage can, and Kassovitz trotting after him wide-eyed as if the jacket had true outlaw allure. As for Audiard's caper, *A Self-Made Hero* (his satirical fable about a Frenchman who joins the Resistance on May 8, 1945), it was another project star-

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ring Kassovitz, this time as an upwardly mobile fabulist who so much wanted his profitable lies to be true that his girlfriends, and the audience, forgave him.

So too will the audience forgive the typically vulnerable and malleable protagonist of Audiard's latest film, *A Prophet* (*Un Prophète*), even though Malik El Djebena is by far the most blood-spattered in this line of characters, and lives in the most violent and claustrophobic of the movies. Claustrophobic, yet expansive—because this contemporary prison drama stretches out for two and a half hours (not a minute of which is wasted) while covering six years of its main character's life and a major portion of the National Front's nightmares.

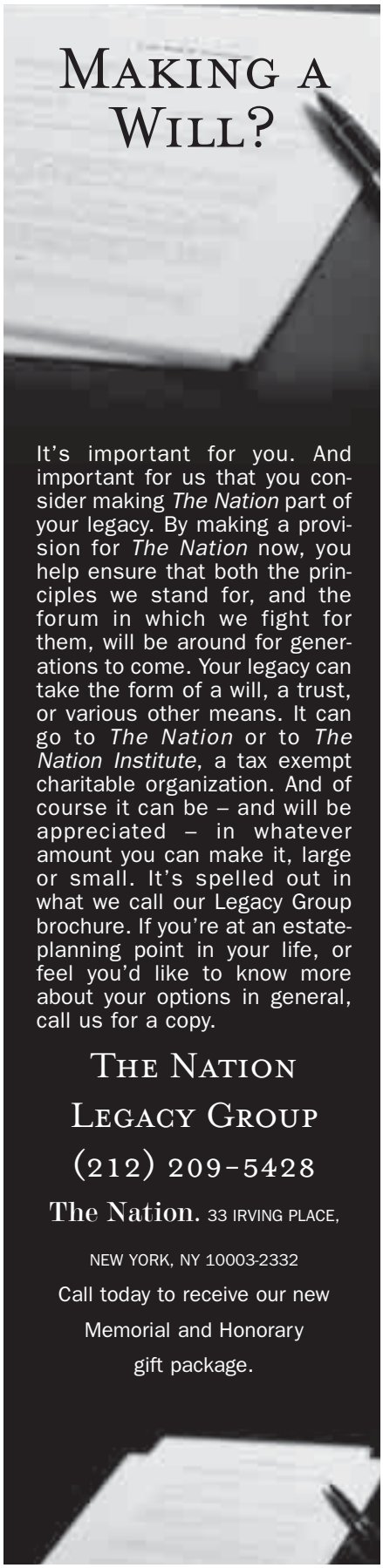
At the heart of the film is the dilemma of a young French Arab—illiterate, unskilled, at home nowhere except in the house of detention—when he at last graduates into the adult prison system and cannot make a place for himself in its cliques. On one side are the other Arabs, whose devotion to daily prayer appears to be alien to Malik. ("Have any special religious needs?" asks a guard—one of the very few old-style French people in the movie—during his intake interview. "You eat pork?" To which Malik shrugs and says, more or less, "Why not?") On the other side are the members of a Corsican gang, who are more powerful, more alien and (worst of all) more interested in Malik.

This gang needs him to kill another inmate, Reyeb, a wary informant who will let no one but a fellow Arab get close enough to strike; and though Malik has neither the tools nor the temperament for this job, he nerves himself up for it rather than let the Corsicans kill him first. In exchange for the murder, he receives a sweater (cheap, but better than his other clothes), the privilege of serving the gang members their coffee (while being called a dirty Arab) and immunity from further bullying (except, of course, by the Corsicans). All this, plus a life-size guilty conscience (which moves into the cell with him, looking just like the man he killed) and a thirst for revenge that is so urgent that Malik must be very, very patient to realize it.

About that guilty conscience, and the film's title: Malik eventually proves to be a prophet in an ironic sense of the word by transforming himself from a lone outsider to a criminal leader. (He even passes through the obligatory "Forty Days and Forty Nights," as noted by one of the film's chapter titles.) But Malik is also a prophet in something closer to the standard sense, as a seer. Some of his visions are so vivid and glowingly colored that they seem physically present—like his murder victim, who can even talk to Malik, despite the gash in his neck. Other visions are gray and shadowy, tapering into darkness at their margins and flashing before Malik in discontinuous glimpses; and these sometimes allow him to anticipate what's going to happen. The paradox of *A Prophet* is that the moments of clairvoyance aren't clear at all but resemble the iris effect that Audiard uses when he wants to make visible the limits of Malik's consciousness.

The film actually begins with one of these effects. First there's darkness and the sound of a man loudly protesting that "You can't put handcuffs on me." (Evidently, he's wrong.) Then, as the sounds continue, a portion of the screen opens to a confusion of clouded views of a police station—they look as if they'd been taken with a handheld camera during a downpour of baking flour—in the midst of which you get your first look at Malik. He sits hunched over in a semi-juvenile condition, scrawny, ragged, bushy-haired and (despite his own handcuffs) silent. If it were not for the cut under his right eye, which is seeping blood, you might imagine this man to be chronically docile and abashed. Certainly he's bewildered. At this stage in the film—and only at this stage—you understand the forces arrayed against Malik a little better than he does. The dimness of the image, which later will signal uncanny insight, here testifies instead to partial blindness.

Soon, though, Malik begins to see the here-and-now in a flood of daylight bright enough to wash out all the colors. This is the condition of the prison yard when he is first summoned by the man who will be his user, oppressor, protector and inadvertent teacher, the Corsican gang boss César Luciani (Niels Arestrup)—as squat, white-haired and nutcracker-profiled a godfather as you will ever meet—whose first words to Malik, interestingly enough, are "Don't look at me." Of course. In *A Prophet*, it sometimes seems as if the whole art of prison governance—the actual governance, I mean, as distinguished from the official—is a matter of determining whose eyes get to see what information. For example, as Malik rises in the system, he gets to acquire video equipment for his cell, on which he can watch contraband porn and clandestinely recorded messages. When Luciani wants to discipline Malik, he does so with a very convincing threat to remove his left eye with a spoon.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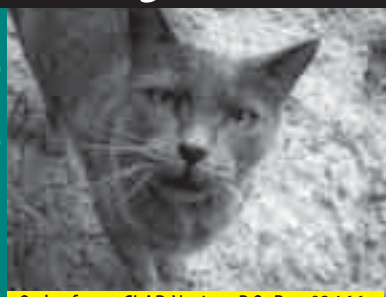

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You might say, then, that in addition to being a tough and suspenseful drama about crime behind bars, a frequently gleeful study of France's changing demographics and an absorbing portrait of an isolated victim studying to become a winner, *A Prophet* is an essay on different modes of vision. It's about the inadequacy of subjective viewpoints, the potential power inherent in a mundane, realistic perspective (what you might call surveillance-camera sight) and the occasional superiority of an inward vision, which can be indistinguishable from blindness. At the decisive moment in his ascension, Malik in fact can see nothing. He is on his back in the middle of a deadly chaos, covered by bodies, unable to lift his head and look around, and for the first time in the film he's laughing.

With that image in mind, it's time to pay tribute to Tahar Rahim, the young actor who in his first major screen role plays Malik, or the many different Maliks who evolve. With his long, narrow head balanced uncertainly on sloping shoulders, Rahim was an easy choice to embody the character's physical vulnerability; but then, any adequate performer could have conveyed the suffering of a man who is periodically left writhing on cement floors. What impresses me about Rahim, and what makes *A Prophet* work so well, is the lightness he brings to the role. There's a gawkiness that permits you to smile a little at Malik's moments of confusion; a bounce to the step (never a strut) that lets you enjoy his hustles; and a secret sassiness that invites you to participate in small triumphs that nobody else is supposed to observe. The ultimate sign of Malik's intelligence? It's the way Rahim sticks out his tongue.

So far as I know, Rahim's most notable previous role was in a French TV miniseries, *La Commune*, written by Abdel Raouf Dafri, who had the idea for *A Prophet* and brought it to Audiard. This doesn't seem to have been a package deal, but it does give evidence that a French Arab sensibility was present at the start of the movie and ran all the way through. Credit where it's due—but especially to Audiard, thanks to whom this hot rod of a movie jolts along on fuel that's equal parts adrenaline and ambiguity.

What expression plays across Malik's features, late in the film, when he finally gets his revenge? The question isn't rhetorical; I really can't say whether satisfaction, sorrow or shock predominates. All I know is that the sequence of long shots and close-ups, in shadow and washed-out light, is perfectly judged and reveals all these emotions on a face that Malik keeps carefully still. Audiard number five: excellent.

Three times a day for the past two months, alerts from a web magazine have pried open my e-mail box with sharp little exclamation points. The reason for this vandalism: I must be told that *Avatar* has now pulled ahead of *The Hurt Locker*, or vice versa, in the Oscars competition.

If these were the only reasonable choices for Best Picture, then I suppose I would hope for the victory of the one that dares to talk politics. (That would be *Avatar*.) But really, only a mug looks to the Oscars for relevance; and how much fun can you expect from them, when Marvin Hamlisch's brilliantly unhinged score for *The Informant!* didn't even get nominated?

I'd rather ignore the whole thing. But because the nominees in the perennially slapdash foreign-language category include Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon*—Audiard's *A Prophet* is another—this might be the moment at last to bring up an awkward subject.

To his admirers, Haneke is a figure of probity, whose immaculate and unnerving formal sense is matched by moral rigor and unsparing social conscience. He shows us the nasty truth about our world, and ourselves, and does so with such uncompromising clarity that we can't look away. For those who feel this way, *The White Ribbon* is a great achievement. Shot to resemble August Sander's classic photographs of peasant life, it is the story of ghastly assaults, some explained, many unsolved, in a German village on the eve of World War I. What do they mean? As one of the film's characters says in retrospect, this story may shed some light on "events that happened later in our country." But the use of the conditional is a dodge. Haneke leaves no room for doubt: you are witnessing the origins of Nazism.

Except that you're not. Haneke's historicism, too, is a dodge (even if he's empty-headed enough to believe in it), given that the punitive tendencies and sexual misery of *The White Ribbon*'s characters are a free-floating condition throughout his films, belonging to every era and therefore to none, explaining everything and therefore nothing. Had *The White Ribbon* presented itself as just another Haneke horror show—see the monsters! feel glad you're not them!—I would have to accept it. But it makes a larger claim, which is so bogus that I finally have to protest: if you want a faithful depiction of Nazism, you'd do better to revel in *Black Book*. ■

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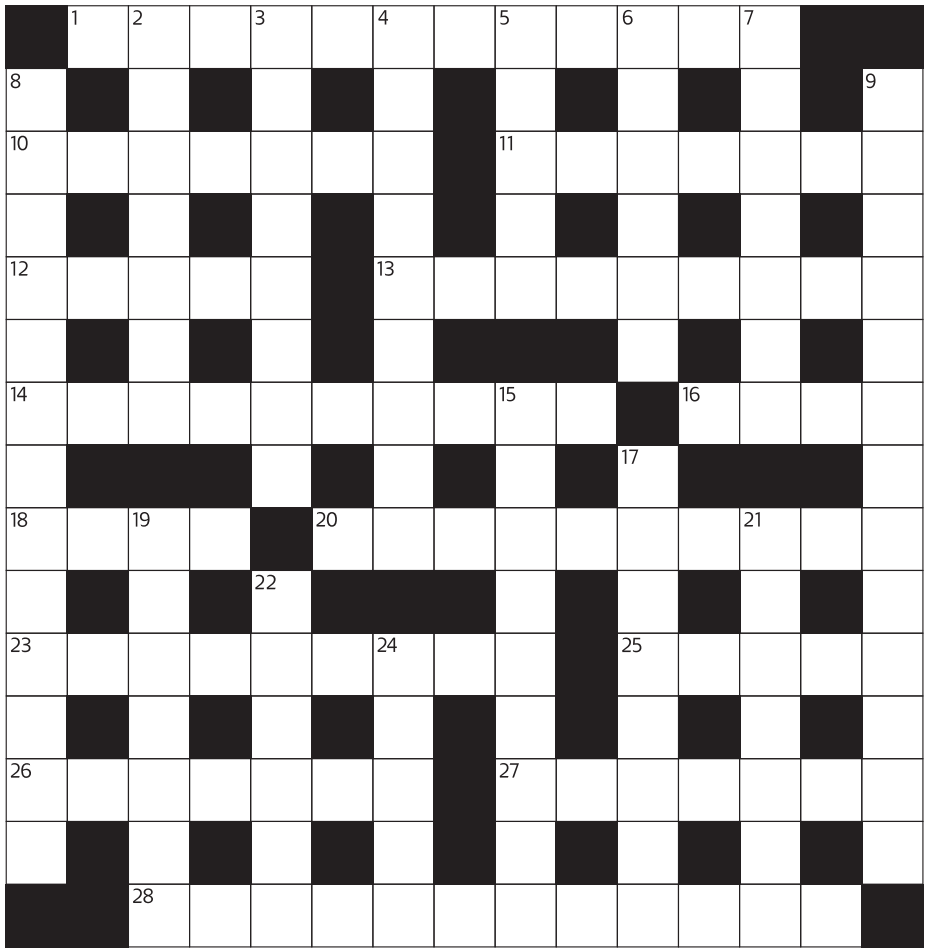

ACROSS

1 One can get a rise out of this, but to a degree a ruler gets what one might take in a hurry. (6,6)

10 It could be the worker to carry what looks like an aardvark. (3,4)

11 and **4** down Red-head? (7,9)

12 State the responsibility of Mario! (5)

13 Do they get paid regularly in auntie's establishment? (9)

14 Sends on the receipts—even if they don't go over the water. (10)

16 "Turnpike" might describe it, if you take military cover. (4)

18 The Walrus and the Carpenter had to give a hand to this. (4)

20 What the "spy in the sky" is supposed to be doing? Or one like Simon Legree? (10)

23 Getting along socially? That's where a butterfly might help! (2,3,4)

25 Ishmael's mother, with a garland to show her off. (5)

26 Everything in a wild ride describes one who fools around! (7)

27 Early lutanist and composer of "The Wise Old Owl and Me." (7)

28 Where we sent mail to GIs, to add to the dental trouble caused by drug handlers. (12)

DOWN

2 A female singer on a get-together in Pennsylvania. (7)

3 Igloo? (3,5)

4 See 11 across

5 The founder of a Turkish dynasty—one of Morocco's many. (5)

6 Sounds like Little Richard more than once found a little antelope! (3-3)

7 Part of the area Liz established, as one might find out. (7)

8 When amateur ornithologists do, it's because one is spotted, according to a signal from the camera operator. (5,3,5)

9 Somewhat dated description for one of "two on the aisle." (8,5)

15 Unnaturally rapid, came to help in an emergency, perhaps. (9)

17 This location in Pakistan is in bad shape, with the fighting going on! (8)

19 Tom on one of the Swiss hills, with a tree here. (7)

21 One wouldn't thank you for showing where to start the fire! (7)

22 In Rome, perhaps, or in Spain you might have found such a sheep originally. (6)

24 The merit of a wild throw? (5)

This puzzle originally appeared in the April 3, 1989, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 1766

C	A	N	T	E	R	B	U	R	Y		I	D	O	L
A		A		S		L		I		R		I		E
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- Comfortable keypad designed to make dialing easy
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Trial Period	30 days	30 days

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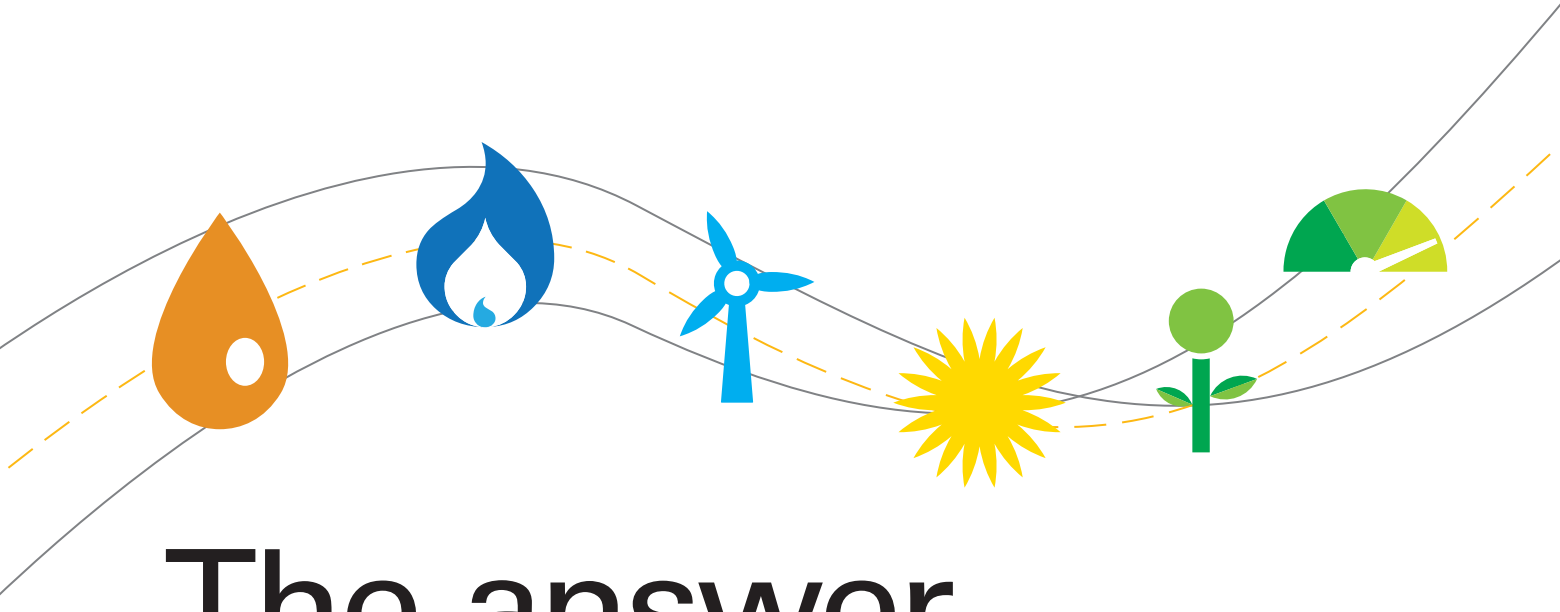

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